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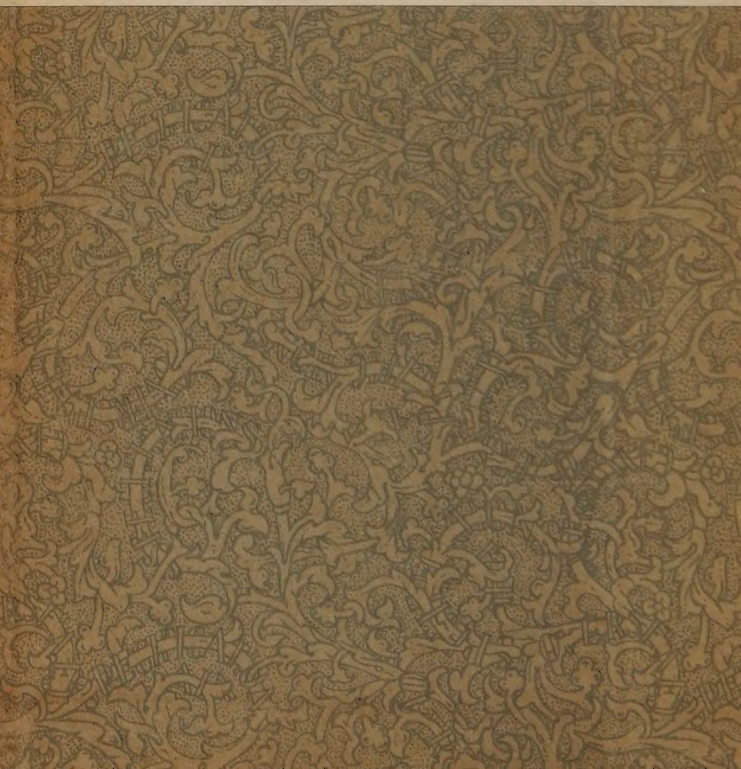

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TO
LORIN DELAND
WHO CAME TO
OLD CHESTER
FOR A WIFE

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"TURN ABOUT"

AROUND OLD CHESTER

"TURN ABOUT"

NOTHING interested Old Chester quite so much as a wedding. Possibly because it had so few of them, but probably because, as even the most respectable community is made up entirely of individuals, who, being human creatures, are at heart gamblers, the greatest gamble in life—marriage—arouses the keenest interest. Old Chester would have been very properly shocked if any outside person had offered to take odds on one of our rare weddings; but all the same we said to one another, "What possessed her to take him?" or, "What on earth can he see in her?" then, in chorus, the gambling instinct betrayed itself: "Let us hope it will turn out well; *but*—"

There were two Old Chester marriages about which it was hardly possible to say anything even as hopeful as "but"; and certainly no one could

have been found to take odds that they would turn out well! There was still a third wedding—But perhaps it is better to begin at the beginning.

The very beginning would be the death, down South, of Jim Williams's widowed sister, Mrs. Sarah Gale, and her legacy to her brother of her baby boy. But that was so very far back! Of course some people were able to remember the astonished dismay of the handsome, quick-tempered young bachelor, James Williams, when, without any warning, a baby was left, so to speak, on his door-step. At least, it arrived in charge of a colored mammy, who installed herself at the Tavern where young Williams had lived since his mother's death; and where, as he came sauntering home to supper in the April dusk, he found the nurse and baby awaiting him. Those who witnessed Jim's emotion when the big, fat, black woman suddenly plumped the baby into his arms, had to retire precipitately to hide mirth which, at such a juncture, would have been unseemly.

"What's this? What's this?" said the startled young man, almost letting his nephew drop under the shock of his soft little weight; then he looked around suspiciously, ready to knock down any grinning onlooker. But nobody laughed, for of course the nurse, with all the satisfaction of her class in giving bad news, had already informed the Tavern of the sad necessity which had brought her to Old Chester.

She informed Jim, with proper tearfulness,

"Mrs. Gale is dead, suh; and she leff this yer blessed lamb to you."

"What? My sister dead!—Oh, do take the thing!" he stammered, shunting the lamb back into the nurse's arms as quickly as he could. Then he got himself together and asked his startled questions—for he had not even known of Mrs. Gale's illness.

Old Chester tradition said that after his first grief at the loss of his sister he almost refused to receive the child. He was not rich, and his little business in Upper Chester scarcely sufficed to provide for his own needs, which were presently to include those of a wife, for he was engaged to be married to a very pretty, very spoiled girl.

"Won't Mr. Gale's relatives take charge of the child?" he asked the nurse; who told him that for practical purposes the late Mr. Gale hadn't any relatives.

"You's the only 'lation the little angel has," she said.

"Little imp!" said Jim to himself; and added, under his breath, "Tough on Mattie." And indeed it was hard on a very young bride to be burdened with a ready-made family, so hard that one can hardly blame Jim Williams for hesitating to accept his legacy. The thing that really decided him to keep the "brat," as he called little George, was that Miss Mattie Dilworth said he mustn't.

"*I* can't take care of a baby," she pouted.

"Darling," he said, looking into her sweet, shallow eyes, "you know, perhaps, some day, *we*—"

She blushed charmingly, but stamped her pretty foot. "I hate babies!"

"You are only a baby yourself," he said, catching her in his arms—she was so very pretty!

But his passion did not soften her toward the baby, though she let her lover kiss her as much as he wanted to. "You've got to send it away," she said, her red lower lip hardening into a straight line.

He made what appeal he could, but nothing he could say moved her, and the wrangle between them went on for a month. Then, one warm June night, down in the perfumed darkness of the Dilworth garden, Mattie, choosing a moment when Jim was most obviously in love, said bluntly that she would not marry him unless he gave up the child.

Jim had artfully introduced the topic of his little nephew:

"Mammy's a bully cook," he began (he and mammy and the baby had taken a house which Mattie had expressed a willingness to live in, and set up an establishment); "you'll love mammy's cake."

Mattie, apparently, was indifferent to cake.

"The baby's a cute little beggar," Jim went on. "I heard him cry this morning when mammy wouldn't let him swallow his big toe; Lord, it

was as good as a play! I had a great mind to pinch him to make him do it again."

"I guess after you've heard him howl a few times you won't like it so much," Mattie said. Then, suddenly, came the ultimatum: "You can choose between your baby and me."

She was sitting on a stone bench near the big white-rose bush, and Jim was kneeling beside her; she bent over him as she put the choice before him, and he felt her soft hair blow across his lips and the pressure of her young breast against his shoulder. She had picked a rose and was brushing it back and forth over his cheek.

"I simply *won't* have the baby; you've got to choose between us."

Her lover was silent, and she struck him lightly with the rose. "Well?" she said.

Jim got on his feet, put his hands in his pockets, and stood looking down at her. "There isn't any choice, Mattie," he said. "Good-by."

Before she could get her wits together he had gone. She was so amazed that for an instant she did not understand what had happened; then she ran after him through the garden: "Come back," she called, softly, "and I'll kiss you!" He paused, his hand on the gate, and looked at her. Then he shook his head, and walked away. Mattie promptly swooned (so she told all her girl friends afterward), right there on the path, all by herself. When she came to she went into the house and sat down and wrote him a letter, the

tenor of which was that she would forgive him. But she said nothing about the brat; so he did not appear, to accept the forgiveness. Upon which Mattie took to her bed, and seemed about to go into a decline. For the next week she despatched many little notes, written on scented pink paper, blistered, the sympathetic bearers averred, with tears, entreating her lover to return to her—but she was silent as to little George; and Jim, growing perceptibly older in those weeks of pain and disillusionment, made acceptance of George the price of his return. That outspoken temper of his fell into a smoldering silence, which was misleading to Old Chester, which was used to his quick gusts of anger. "He'll make up with her," people said. They said it to Mattie, and no doubt it encouraged the output of pink notes. But he did not "make up."

In those days in Old Chester the word was so nearly the bond, that it took courage to break an engagement. When the woman did it, with loss of appetite, and (presumably) earnest prayer, Old Chester tried to be charitable: "Oh, I suppose if you don't love him, you oughtn't to marry him. But how *shocking* to change your mind!" When the man was the one who did the breaking, the disapproval was less delicately expressed. "Somebody ought to cowhide him!" said Old Chester, and sent the girl wine-jelly in sheaf-of-wheat molds to console her.

Jim Williams had not exactly broken his en-

gagement, because Mattie had taken the first step toward ending it; but he would not "make up," so it was plain that he was heartless; "ungallant," was Old Chester's expression. As for Mattie, she was a jilt; there was no other word for it, although her girl friends tried to excuse her by saying (as she herself said) that Jim cared more for a perfectly strange baby than he did for her happiness. "I told him I would forgive him," she sobbed on every sympathetic shoulder; "and he would not come back! It is an insult!" she added, her breath catching pitifully in her pretty throat.

But when its shoulder was not being wept upon, Old Chester said, grimly: "It's the pot and the kettle; he is ungallant, and she is a jilt."

To be sure, one or two people—Dr. Lavendar, notably, and, curiously enough, Mattie's own brother, Mr. Thomas Dilworth—said Jim had shown his sense in not accepting the olive-branch.

"It's a pity more people don't discover that they don't want to get married before the wedding-day than after it," said Dr. Lavendar; and Thomas Dilworth said that, though he had a great mind to thrash Jim Williams, he must say Jim was no fool.

Old Mrs. Dilworth, with a dish of whipped cream in her hand, pausing on her way up-stairs to her daughter's bedroom, looked over the banisters and reproached her son for his harshness: "She's simply fading away!" said Mrs. Dilworth, tearfully fumbling for her damp handkerchief.

"I don't think Mattie 'll fade very far away," Tom said; I've lived with my dear sister for eighteen years, mother, and why any fellow should want to marry her—"

"*Thomas!*"

"Oh, well, of course Jim ought to stand up to the guns, like a man, when a lady summons him. Yes; I reckon I'll have to thrash him."

"Mother!" a plaintive voice called from upstairs; "*do* bring me something to eat."

Tom burst out laughing, and, whistling loudly, sallied forth, ostensibly for the purpose of thrashing the defaulting lover. It was a hot July afternoon, and meeting Jim on the bank of the river, he commented on the weather and suggested that they should go in swimming.

"Happy thought," said Williams; "it's as hot as blazes."

They tramped amicably to a deep pool, where the river, curving back on itself, was shadowed by overhanging trees. There, behind some blossoming elder-bushes, they stripped, dived in, swam the length of the brown, still inlet dappled with flecks of sunshine, splashed each other, roared with laughter, and then came out and lay gleaming wet in the grass under the locust-trees. Tom, his clasped hands beneath his curly head, looked up through the lacy leaves into a cloudless blue sky, and said, as if the thought had just occurred to him:

"I understand you and Mattie have bust up?"

"She doesn't like that brat I have on my hands," Jim said, gravely, "and as I can't get rid of him, she has to get rid of me."

"I would attach myself to the brat with hooks of steel," Thomas said, warmly; then, remembering his responsibilities, he added: "If you urge her, maybe she'll give in?"

Jim rolled over on his stomach, pulled a stalk of blossoming grass, and nibbled its white end; the sun shone on his glistening wet shoulders and his shapely, sinewy legs kicking up over his back: "'If the court knows itself, which it think it do,'" he said, "Mattie won't give in." (He added to himself, "I bet she won't get the chance to!") But this, of course, he did not say, or the thrashing really might have taken place.

"Oh, well, she'll get over it," Mattie's brother assured him.

"Of course," Jim agreed, stiffly. "Confound it, Tom, the sun is hot on your bare skin. Let's get into our togs."

"'Fraid of your complexion, I suppose?" Tom grunted. "Don't worry; the girls won't look at you now." That was the only real thrust that he gave. They put on their clothes, and went off in opposite directions, Tom whistling blithely, and Jim looking very sober. He never talked with any one about the broken engagement. When small things offended him, his temper went off like a firecracker; but when he was deeply hurt or angry, he was silent.

Old Chester liked Jim, and did not very much like Mattie Dilworth; it thought she would have made James, or anybody else, a poor wife; but in those days, especially in Old Chester, tradition of what was due to "the sex" overlaid common sense. Nobody ever forgot that Williams had declined a girl's overtures. Even when, six months later, the girl was sufficiently consoled to marry one of the Philadelphia Whartons (excellent match, certainly;) and disappeared from Old Chester's narrow horizon, disapproval of Jim still lingered; probably his cynical allusions to "the sex" helped to keep it alive. As years passed, it became an accepted belief that the young man—growing rapidly into an older man—had been deficient in gallantry. In speaking of him, Old Chester generally coupled what it had to say with the regret that he had "behaved badly." It always added, as a matter of justice, that at least he had done his duty to his nephew.

Jim accepted this opinion of his conduct with sardonic meekness. Once in a while he referred to the "days of his unregeneracy," and everybody knew what he meant. But he never brought forth works meet for regeneration in the way of paying attention to any other lady in Old Chester—or out of it, either. Instead he devoted himself to the token and reason of his misbehavior, his little nephew, who, painfully shy with every other human being, returned his devotion with positive worship. G. G., as his uncle called him,

used to trot along at Jim's side, lifting adoring eyes to the hard, handsome face, and watching for the lifting of a finger to bid him go this way or that. Jim's way of bringing him up was curt, and left nothing to the imagination:

"*Don't howl.*"

"*Take off your hat to the ladies.*"

"*Tell the truth and be damned to you!*"

This last precept was not, perhaps, for the ears of elderly ladies. Nevertheless, obedience to such precepts will make a fair sort of gentleman; and G. G. was very obedient. Telling the truth came easily to him, and he was able to swallow howls without difficulty—very likely his bashfulness helped him in this regard. But the taking off his hat (which was his uncle's metaphor for the tradition he had himself violated) came hard. When, quivering with shyness, he plunged out of the post-office in front of Mrs. Dale, or when, almost in a whisper, he stammered out "w-won't" to Miss Maria Welwood, who asked him to kiss her; when, again and again, his little cap was not lifted to Old Chester ladies, he was astonished and pained to receive what his Uncle Jim called a "walloping." "What!" Jim roared at him, "refuse, when a lady offers to kiss you? Shame on you, sir!" In his mild way, G. G. disapproved of wallopings bestowed for inadequate reasons. Had they come for stealing apples, or playing truant, or not knowing his collect on Saturday afternoon, he would have understood

them; but for trying to escape from slow, lame old ladies—or, worse yet! brisk old ladies, who *talked about kisses!*—wallopings for such things were not reasonable. G. G. used to ponder this. But he was certain of one thing—that he would rather be walloped than kissed. He did not really resent punishment. If Uncle Jim wanted to wallop him, why shouldn't he? When it was over, he used to shake himself like a puppy, and (in spirit) lap the hand that beat him. He really tried to remember to take off his hat, merely to please his uncle. Once, for a whole week, he carried his cap in his hand, so that it might surely be off his head at the approach of a lady.

When he went to the Academy for Youths in Upper Chester, his terror of the sex did not diminish. Probably the happiest period of his youth was when, just after he graduated, the war broke out, and he and his uncle, enlisting on the same day, went through four womanless years together. Jim rose rapidly in rank, but G. G., tagging as close behind him as circumstances permitted, got no higher than orderly to his uncle—a position he filled with satisfaction.

And this is where the story of Old Chester's two horrifying marriages ought really to begin. . . .

Behold then, in the late '60's—two gentlemen, one very stout, with superb dark eyes, a goatee, and long, white mustaches; "terribly old," Miss Ellen's girls called him; "at least fifty!" And one young (well, youngish; twenty-five, perhaps);

who said "*thank* you!" with nervous intensity whenever you spoke to him. He also had a mustache, a very little golden mustache, that you could hardly see; very freckled, he was, and very slim; preternaturally grave, "and, oh, so brave!" the girls told one another; but shy to a degree that made even Miss Ellen's girls (anxious to find a masculine idol) laugh. The two gentlemen, ruled by one ancient woman-servant, Ann, lived near enough to Old Chester to walk into the village for their mail or to church, and far enough from Upper Chester to drive to the factory every day in an old buggy, that sagged nearly to the axle under Jim Williams's large bulk which pushed little G. G. almost out over the wheel.

As they drove thus one misty September morning, the captain retailed at length the events of a business trip which had taken him away from home for nearly a month, during which time the younger member of the firm had had to run things at the factory. "So," said the captain, slapping a rein down on his horse's flank, "so there's nothing for us to do but get a condenser."

"We've had an increase in the population in Old Chester," G. G. said, suddenly.

"You don't say so!" said the captain. "Who are the happy parents?"

G. G. blushed furiously. "Not that kind of an increase, sir! Visitors."

"You don't say so!" said the captain, again. "Who are the unhappy hosts?"

"The Dilworths," his nephew told him.

The captain ruminated: "I think we'd better get the largest size?"

"It's his sister, and her niece—I mean her husband's niece," G. G. explained.

"*What!*" said the captain; "Mattie?" He whistled loudly. "I haven't seen that lady since the days of my unregeneracy." By the time they had reached Upper Chester the condenser had been decided upon, and the captain had been made aware that "that lady's" husband's niece was named Miss Netty Brown, and that she and Mrs. Wharton were to be with the Dilworths for two months.

"I wonder what Thomas has done that the Lord should punish him?" said Captain Williams.

"The second size would do," G. G. said.

"Is she pretty?" his uncle asked.

"Her hair is gray," said G. G.

"Lord, man, I mean the niece!" the captain said. "No; don't look at both sides of a cent—we must have the largest one. The aunt is pretty enough, I wager. That kind always is pretty."

By means of talking at cross-purposes, a good deal of information as to nieces and condensers was exchanged, and the result was that one member of the firm was very thoughtful. That night the thought burst out:

"G. G., you ought to be married."

"*Oh!*" his nephew protested, with a shocked look.

"Yes," the captain declared; "men deserve to get married—for their sins."

"You seem to have escaped chastisement," George Gale said, slyly.

"Well, yes; the Lord has been merciful to me," Jim admitted; "but then I haven't deserved it as much as some."

The next day was Sunday; and as the uncle and nephew walked to church, G. G. was struck by the splendor of the captain's apparel; a flowered velvet waistcoat, a frock-coat with a rolling velvet collar, a high beaver hat that was reserved for funerals! Morning service in Old Chester rarely saw such elegance. George pondered over it, when not looking at the visitors in the Dilworth pew. The Dilworth children had been put in the pew behind their own to make room for these visitors—for the lady with gray hair took up a great deal of room. Mrs. Wharton, who was in half-mourning for a very recent husband, wore a black satin mantle, trimmed with jet fringe that twinkled and tinkled whenever she rose or sat down, and especially when she bowed in the creed —which last made the Dilworth children gape open-mouthed at her back, for except when Mr. Spangler had substituted for Dr. Lavendar, no one had ever been seen to do such a thing in Old Chester! She had on a wonderful bonnet of black and white crêpe roses, and a crystal-spotted white lace veil; her black silk dress took up so much space that Tom and his wife were squeezed

into either corner of the pew, while the other guest, her niece, was almost hidden by flounces.

Yet not so hidden that George could not see her. He had watched her thus each Sunday during his uncle's absence; and twice, after church, he had found himself—standing first on one foot and then on the other—informing her that it was a pleasant day. The second time he made this remark it chanced, unhappily, to be raining, and G. G.'s embarrassment at realizing his blunder was so excruciating that he had not since gone near enough to speak to her; but how he had looked at her!—at the back of her little head in its neat brown bonnet; at the nape of her delicate neck, with its fringe of small, light-brown curls; at her pretty figure when she let her brown mantilla slip from her shoulders because the church was warm. Dr. Lavendar's sermon might have been in Greek for all the profit Mr. George Gale got out of it!

At the close of the service Captain Williams said, carelessly, "We'll stop and pay our respects to the Dilworths, my boy."

G. G. hesitated, blushed to the roots of his hair, and said, he—he—he guessed he couldn't, sir! "It's—the weather," he blurted out. Then, under his uncle's astonished eyes, he bolted for home as fast as his legs could carry him.

"What on earth is the matter with the weather?" Jim Williams called after him; but he frowned a little. "He ought to have his nose pulled!"

he said to himself; "that is no way to treat a female."

However Jim Williams might have treated females in the past, it was evident that he knew how to treat them in the present. He sauntered up to the Dilworth family, who were walking decorously along the path through the graveyard, and made a very elegant bow to Mrs. Dilworth, and a still more elegant one to his old lady-love. Mrs. Mattie Wharton's bow was as elegant as his own; but whereas Jim had a twinkle in his eye, Mattie was gravity itself.

"Come home to dinner, Jim," said Tom Dilworth; and Mrs. Wharton said, archly:

"If you don't come I shall think I've driven you away. I hear you are a woman-hater, Captain."

"Ah," said the captain, twisting his long mustache and bowing again very low, "I am only woman-hated! And as for you, I hear you are still breaking hearts!"

"And I hear that you still say naughty things about my sex," she retorted, gaily.

They were really a very handsome pair as they stood there in the graveyard, exchanging these polite remarks, while all the Dilworths, and the little niece, looked on in admiring silence. As for dinner—"Indeed I will!" said Jim; "I know Mrs. Dilworth's Sunday dinners!" and he bowed to Tom's good, dull Amelia, who was immensely pleased with his reference to her dinners. Then

they all walked off to the Dilworth house, Mrs. Wharton rustling along on the captain's arm, and her niece reaching up to take Mr. Thomas Dilworth's arm, and pacing with neat footsteps at his side.

G. G. at home, thinking of all the fine things he might have said, cursing himself for an ass, finally ate a cold and solitary meal—for the captain did not appear.

"No use waiting for him," G. G. told Ann; "he must have stayed for dinner at Mr. Dilworth's."

George Gale was awe-struck at such behavior on his uncle's part. "Talk about courage!" he said to himself—"those perfectly strange ladies!" Then he had a sudden unpleasant thought: Mrs. Wharton was not quite a strange lady to his uncle. "Can't be he'll make up to her again, *now?*" G. G. thought; for, of course, like everybody else in Old Chester, the captain's nephew knew what had happened in the unregenerate days.

When Jim got home, late in the afternoon, he found George sitting out in the arbor in the garden, with coffee cold in the pot on a little table beside him. It was very pleasant there in the arbor, with the sunshine sifting through the yellowing grape-leaves, and the clusters of ripening Isabellas within reach of one's hand; G. G. could see the glint of the river in the distance, and the air was sweet with heliotrope blossoming under the dining-room windows; but in spite

of his surroundings, George Gale looked distinctly unhappy. When Jim came tramping into the arbor, G. G. gave him a keen and anxious glance.

"You scoundrel!" said the captain; "what did you cut and run for? I believe you'd rather face a cannon than a pretty woman!"

"She *is* handsome," G. G. conceded, sadly.

"So I have to do your work for you," Jim continued; "yes, she's darned pretty. And, for a wonder, neither a fool nor a vixen. In my day, a pretty girl was either one or the other."

"Oh," said G. G., brightening; "you are referring to Miss Brown?"

"Lord!" Jim protested, "did you think I was training my guns on the aunt? The niece will never have her looks, though."

Again George's brow furrowed. "She's got her claws on him," he thought.

"You are gone on the niece, hey?" said the captain; "I know the symptoms when I see 'em!"

"Why, no, sir; oh no, sir," G. G. stammered; "not at all, sir."

"Now," said the captain, pulling his goatee, and paying no attention to the denial, "you've got to get to work! They are only going to be here a month. I guess that's all Tom can stand of *her*. How merciful Providence was to me! G. G., I owe you much."

George's face cleared. "I guess she won't catch him," he thought, hopefully.

"What I want to know is what you have done

in the month they've been here?" said the captain. "Have you attacked in front, or deployed, or just laid siege?"

G. G. thought of his remark about the weather and blushed. "I—I—really—"

"Now listen," said the captain; "I understand such matters, or I did—in the days of my unregeneracy. You don't, and I guess you never will; but that's no excuse, sir, for the way you behaved this morning! A man that slights a young lady ought to be booted. Well; you must see the aunt—do you understand? And make yourself agreeable to her! I would not advise flattery—merely judicious disregard of truth will put her on your side. Not that you'll have much difficulty! 'If the court knows itself, which it think it do,' I guess she'll be only too glad to get that gentle creature off her hands."

"But—" said G. G., red to the roots of his hair.

"Darn it!" said the captain, sharply, "what do you want? Isn't she good enough for you? What are you waiting for? An oil princess? See here, George, if I caught you playing with that young lady's feelings, or lacking in respect—"

"I have the greatest possible respect! Only I have no reason to suppose that she has the slightest—"

"Make her have the 'slightest'; make her have the 'greatest,' too. Make love, my boy, make love!"

"I don't know how," G. G. said, with agitation.

"We'll call on 'em to-morrow afternoon," his uncle declared; "and you watch me with her. I know the ropes—though it's some time since I worked 'em. I'll show you how to do it. I understand the sex."

"*Thank* you, sir," said G. G.

When they made their call, George watched the handsome, elderly man attentively. If that was love-making, it was simple enough—it consisted in looking hard at the little, quiet girl, who wore a buff cross-barred muslin dress, sprinkled over with brown rosebuds; bending towards her, and lowering his voice when he spoke to her; and most of all, in complimenting her. Those compliments made G. G.'s flesh creep! How could *he* ever tell a girl that "her cheek put the damask rose to shame"? that he "did not know whether she had spoken or a bird had sung"? "What absurd things to say!" G. G. reflected; "of course he knows; and to be as red as a rose would be unhealthy. I wonder if she likes things like that? I don't believe she does, she looks so sensible."

The fact was, Miss Netty did not care much for the captain's old-fashioned and ponderous politeness, but she cared for him; for his handsome face, his flashing dark eyes, his grand manner. There is a moment—a very fleeting moment—when youth feels the fascination of age. The boy feels it at nineteen; it is then that he falls in love with the lady who might have dandled him on her knee; a girl experiences it at about twenty-

one, when worldly wisdom is dazzlingly attractive. The handsome man of fifty, or even sixty, provided he is blasé enough, can bring the color into a girl's face and quicken the beating of her heart much more successfully than the boy of her own age. It works the other way round, too: Youth is a beautiful thing! How age lingers beside it, cowering over the upspringing flame to warm the chill current of its blood! Not that either Jim Williams or Mrs. Wharton was very old or very cold; but George Gale and the little girl in brown were warm with life.

G. G. would have preferred to watch the glow in the girlish face; but he obeyed orders, and talked to Mrs. Wharton. He was so conscious of his own part in the broken romance of her life that he was more than usually speechless; but she helped him very much—she listened so respectfully, she asked his opinions so simply, she was so relieved to be told this or that; "people are so ignorant, you know, Mr. Gale. I should think you would feel it, living in a place like Old Chester, where you have so few equals." G. G., blushing and protesting, said to himself that she was really very brilliant; "no wonder Uncle Jim was soft on her," he thought, admiringly.

Miss Netty, listening to Captain Williams, was also thinking of those days when the old gentleman had made love to her aunt: "How could he fall in love with aunty!" she wondered; "*he's* so nice."

If the captain or the widow made any impression

on either of the two young creatures, it was not in the way they supposed. The boy and the girl were entirely impervious to the middle-aged flattery expended upon them; they merely felt the appeal of life that has been lived. In the brief moment of farewells, each told the other, shyly, how wonderful their respective relations were. But neither told the other how wonderful they were themselves.

As uncle and nephew walked home, Jim with a confident and springing step, G. G. keeping up as best he might, the ladies were the only topic of conversation.

"Mattie is the same old humbug," Captain Williams said.

"I thought the aunt a very agreeable lady," G. G. said, politely.

"Agreeable grandmother! Only she isn't a grandmother, more shame to her! Every woman ought to be a grandmother at her age. No, sir. The sweet creature is pining to have you rescue her. I bet Mattie beats her."

G. G. was horrified into momentary speechlessness; then he said, boldly, "You are not very gallant, sir."

"I heard that about twenty-five years ago," said the captain. "Well; let me be a warning to you; don't you trifle with Miss Netty's feelings!" Then he asked G. G. when he was going to pop? George blushed to his ears, and refused to commit himself.

"Make up for my errors, and be agreeable to the aunt," said Captain Williams; "when you've soft-soaped her enough, ask if you may pay your addresses to the little brown niece."

"Why should I not ask the—the—young lady herself?" G. G. inquired, simply.

"Not correct," said Captain Williams; "besides, unless you flatter Mattie, and get her on your side, she's capable of carrying the girl off, just to spite me. She hates me as the devil hates holy water."

George grinned: "She may be a devil, sir, but I would never call you holy."

"Thank God for that!" said Jim.

So G. G. called at Tom Dilworth's each afternoon, and, as long as the frost spared it, took with him a big bunch of heliotrope from old Ann's garden under the dining-room windows. Acting on the captain's advice, he presented the bouquet (so far as he could, in his uncle's manner) to each lady, turn about. Sometimes Jim Williams went with him, and did his best to further the campaign by telling Miss Netty what a fine fellow G. G. was.

"I should think he would be, living with you!" Netty said, prettily. On the way home that night, Jim twisted his mustache, and said that, by gad! the little witch had sense as well as heart.

"You can see she's no relation of Mattie's. Mattie has no more heart than a hollow potato."

"I thought it was you who were deficient in heart in the days of your unregeneracy?" G. G. said.

"I was all heart," Jim Williams retorted. "Talk about the 'gentle' sex—do you remember those females in New Orleans? Where would you find a man who would behave as they did? No, sir; I would rather meet a tiger than a tigress, any day!" Then he left generalizations: "Pop, my boy, pop! I can see she's dead in love with you."

G. G. glowed; "*Thank* you, sir!" he said.

He might have said "thank you" every day, for the captain never failed to speak some encouraging word about his suit. Yet, somehow, when it came to the point of action, G. G. quailed. He was not afraid that Miss Netty would refuse him; they had hardly spoken to each other, but the free-masonry of youth had given him information on that point which the captain's certainties only corroborated. No; he was not afraid of being rejected when he asked; he was only afraid —until his very backbone was cold!—of asking.

"They are going away on Monday," his uncle warned him; "you'll lose her yet! Walk home with her to-morrow from church, and pop! George, if I thought you were amusing yourself with this young lady, I'd—"

"Of course I'm not," G. G. said, gruffly.

"Then stop your shilly-shallying," said the captain.

G. G. set his teeth. He was only too anxious to stop shilly-shallying.

The next day he was as beautifully dressed

as the captain himself, and when they came out of church (where he had not heard one word of Dr. Lavendar's sermon) he kept close at his uncle's heels until, in the churchyard, they joined the Dilworths. Miss Netty, seeing him approach, strayed a little from the graveled path. An old slate tombstone, leaning sidewise in the deep grass near the wall, suddenly seemed to interest her, and with a fleeting glance of invitation over her shoulder, she wandered across to it, listening all the while for a pursuing footstep. Her heart was beating hard as she stood by the sunken green cradle of the old grave, reading with unseeing eyes the scarcely decipherable inscription on the lichen-mottled stone; almost before the hoped-for step sounded behind her, she turned her glowing face,—alas! it was only the captain, who had come to bring his quarry to George. There was something in the child's sweet betraying eyes and the sudden crimson flag in her cheeks that touched Jim Williams inexpressibly, but made him angry, too.

"I'll boot that boy if he doesn't come up to the scratch!" he said to himself; then he told Miss Netty that the Dilworths were waiting for her; "and so is my nephew; the boy has lost his heart, and I'm afraid his head has gone with it, for he has left me to escort you."

But before the captain and Netty caught up with the others, G. G. found himself pacing along beside good, dull Mrs. Dilworth. So there was

nothing for the captain to do but stride off with Miss Netty on his arm. Twice did Jim Williams look over his shoulder to urge his nephew to rise to the occasion.

"Why in thunder doesn't he step up, and give me a chance to fall back?" he thought to himself; "I can't go and leave her here, unattended, in the middle of the street!" Finally, in despair, he paused and called out: "George, I wish to speak to Mrs. Dilworth. You come and escort Miss Netty!"

G. G., making some stammering apologies to Mrs. Dilworth, and throwing a whispered "*Thank* you, sir!" at his uncle, stepped up and offered Miss Netty a trembling arm. She took it prettily, but the ardent moment by the lichen-covered grave-stone had passed, and Netty was as taciturn as G. G. himself. They walked to the Dilworths' gate in blank silence. There, waiting for her hosts, Miss Netty said, with a little effort:

"Your uncle is wonderful! He was telling me such interesting stories of the war; he said you were very brave."

"It's easy enough to be brave in *war*," said poor G. G. Then they were silent until the others came up. Just as they arrived Netty, scarlet to her little ears, burst out:

"I hope the Dilworth girls will write to me and tell me all the Old Chester news. I shall write to Mary—and give her my address."

"Oh, *thank* you!" G. G. said, passionately.

They looked at each other, and looked away—breathless. . . . If only the Dilworth family and Mrs. Wharton and the captain had not arrived at that particular moment! . . .

"Well!" said Jim Williams, as soon as he and his nephew had turned toward home; "did you?"

"How could I?" poor George retorted. "You never gave me any chance!"

The captain was dumfounded. "*I* didn't give you a chance? I? Why, confound you, I held on to her by main force till you could come up and get her—and I had to call you at the last minute. You stuck to Amelia Dilworth like a porous plaster! Do you mean to say you didn't say one word—"

"Oh yes!" George broke in; "yes; I did—speak. She said she would send Mary Dilworth her address, and I s-said—"

"What did you say?"

"I said—why, I said, 'Th-thank you.'"

"You said 'thank you'! Well, I vow, of all the donkeys!" The captain was ready to swear with impatience. "'Thank you,' to a girl who was waiting—*waiting*, I tell you!—to have you say 'Will you?' George, look here; you are playing with that girl's feelings!"

"I'm no such thing!" George Gale said, with answering anger. "I meant to pay my addresses this morning, but as I say, you—"

"Oh yes, blame me! blame me!" the captain broke in; "you haven't the spunk of a wood-

pigeon. I tell you, rather than have that child slighted, I'll marry her myself." His burst of anger was sharp enough to put an end to G. G.'s stammering.

"I can manage my own affairs, thank you."

G. G.'s temper was not so quick as his uncle's, but it was more lasting. Jim always yielded first, but he had to grovel a little before George softened.

"Darn it, G. G. I didn't mean that you were not behaving properly."

Silence.

"Of course I know you are a white man, but I—"

"But you thought I wasn't?"

"I didn't think anything of the kind! Only I don't want to see that little thing disappointed."

"She sha'n't be disappointed," George assured him, briefly.

The captain was relieved to be forgiven, but he still scolded: "You've lost your chance. *I'll* never take the trouble to make a match for you again!"

Of course his determination did not last twenty-four hours. When the ladies went fluttering out of Old Chester on the Monday-morning stage he was already planning what had best be done.

"You must go after 'em, my young Lochinvar. No; I won't go with you. I've done my best, but it seems I didn't give satisfaction. You must hoe your own potato-patch—and you can go and

see the condensers at the same time. The largest size is my choice. You must go after 'em, George. You must take to-morrow's stage."

"Thank you, sir," G. G. said, nervously.

However, the next day's stage did not carry the ardent lover. Things moved slowly in Old Chester; Mary Dilworth did not learn Netty's address for a fortnight; it was three days later before G. G. heard it, and another three before he "came out of the West." When he did, it was a great experience to both men; the captain was as excited as if he were a match-making mother sending a girl into the matrimonial market. Poor G. G. was fairly dazed with instructions: he must do that; he mustn't do this; most of all, he must remember to invite Mattie to stay at their house before the wedding. "She'll like that," said Jim; "she'll save money on it, and she'll think she can catch me again."

"God forbid!" said G. G., under his breath; but he listened carefully to the endless details of etiquette which had been *comme il faut* in the day when the captain went courting—and how successfully! For Mattie had "tumbled at the first gun," Jim told his nephew. . . . If G. G. only followed his directions, Miss Netty could not possibly withstand him.

"Besides," said Jim, "as I've told you a thousand times, she has no desire to withstand you. 'If the court knows itself, which it think it do,' *she'll* tumble at the first pop."

"*Thank* you, sir!" said G. G., grinning with happiness.

And so he set forth upon his quest for a bride.

The captain was not far wrong: the object of G. G.'s devotion may not have been ready to "tumble at the first gun," but Lochinvar was expected. To be sure, the little disappointment in the graveyard had brought a puzzled look into the soft brown eyes; but the captain had told her that George had "lost his heart,"—and surely the captain must know! Netty thought of the captain with a thrill of admiration; "how *could* he have cared for aunty—he is such a darling!"

She and her aunt, after a week of short visits (which, to Mrs. Wharton's disgust, were not stretched by appreciative hosts into long visits), were moving, on the top of a canal-boat, between the stubbly fields and russet woods of a wide, flat landscape. The ladies had raised their fringed parasols, for the October sunshine was hot; the mule on the tow-path cast a longing eye at the cool, lush greenness of the weeds growing in the water; sometimes he seized a mouthful, and the smell of the crushed stems mingled with the odor of the slow current. The water lapped drowsily against the side of the old boat that nosed along through lily-pads or brushed under leaning willows; dragon-flies flashed about its blunt bows; once a blackbird lighted on a stanchion and gave his clear, loud call; and once there was a sleepy hail from a fisherman sitting

on the grassy bank. In the open country the water road stretched in the blazing sunshine, straight as a silver ribbon; overhead, a white cloud, domed and glistening, hung motionless; except for the monotonous tug of the mule on the tow-path, everything was so quiet, that two of the deck-hands had gone to sleep. But neither of the ladies under the fringed parasols was drowsy. Mrs. Wharton's face had relaxed (there being no gentlemen on board) into fretful lines. She was worrying acutely about the future, and ever since they had taken their seats on the boat she had been talking about it to Netty. "I don't know how your uncle thought I could live on what he left me," she complained, over and over. Sometimes she reproached her living brother, instead of her dead husband. "You would have supposed Thomas would have asked us to spend the winter with him; he knows I have to visit to make both ends meet; perhaps he didn't want you."

But it was not Mrs. Wharton's conversation that kept Netty from yielding to the somnolence of the afternoon; she was thinking such intent little thoughts of the captain and G. G. that she really did not hear the endless stream of words that kept on and on, like water dripping from an unclosed tap. Netty was going over in her mind all that "he" had said, and looked, and left unsaid. Sometimes she blushed softly, sometimes smiled, sometimes, when the fretful voice beside

her paused, apparently for a reply, she murmured a non-committal syllable or two: "Really?" "Dear me!" "Yes, indeed"; and the complaints dribbled on. Once, with shy effort, she asked Mrs. Wharton about the uncle and nephew; and this time she listened:

"Oh yes; I can tell you all about them. Jim was good-looking enough when I knew him. He's gone off, dreadfully; he shows his age very much. He hadn't much money in those days. When he said he was going to undertake to support this child—Mr. G. G., I mean—of course I wouldn't put up with it. Now he's quite well-to-do, Brother Tom says; and Mr. G. G. will get it all. No; he never married; he never got over it—I mean me."

"Perhaps," said Netty, "he'd be glad, now, if you'd forgive him?"

"Forgive him?" said Mrs. Wharton, sourly. "You mean—take him? I wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole!" She blushed so hotly that Netty had another thought of her own: "*She tried to get him!*"

After that, as the yellow afternoon thickened into dusk, and the form of the mule on the tow-path was hardly discernible against the alders and willows, she thought much of the captain, and his fine manners and his beautiful eyes. Then she wondered whether he would want Mr. G. G. to live at home, if—if he married? "It would be pleasant to live at Captain Williams's

house," she reflected. When a deck-hand hung a lighted lantern on the post behind them, Netty got out her little portfolio and, balancing it on her knee, wrote to Mr. Thomas Dilworth's youngest girl. It was a very girlish letter, and of course it had a postscript:

P. S.—Aunty is going to stay in Paterson a fortnight; she has friends there, the Boardmans. If anybody asks my ["my" was scratched out, and "our" written over it] address, you can say the Eagle House—unless Mrs. Boardman invites us to stay with her.

Netty made many calculations as to how many days would probably elapse before that postscript could reach G. G. He would see the Dilworths at church on Sunday, and Mary would tell him. After that . . . "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—" Netty counted. Allowing a day or two to pack up and get off, he ought to arrive by Friday.

So it was that when they had disembarked at Paterson, and were settled in the old Eagle House, just in time to escape an October storm, the little brown girl, as the captain called her, stood for long hours with her small nose pressed against the grimy window-pane of Mrs. Wharton's room.

"What do you keep looking out of the window for?" her aunt said, fretfully, from her lounge at the foot of the bed.

"Oh, just to see things," said the girl, vaguely, staring into the steadily falling rain.

"There's nothing to see in this horrid place," Mrs. Wharton complained; "I wouldn't have come here if I hadn't supposed the Boardmans would have had the decency to invite us to stay with them. I wrote Ella Boardman I was to be here, two weeks ago. There's no excuse for not inviting me! Now, I suppose I've got to stay in this dreadful hotel, because it costs too much to travel. If I had any money I'd go to Europe. I could, too, if I had only myself to provide for."

Jim Williams had not been very far wrong when he said that her aunt-in-law beat poor little Miss Netty; to be sure, it was with her tongue, not with a club; but the implement doesn't make much difference. At any rate, the blow was severe enough to bring the tears, and they, and the grime on the window, blurred the street so that Netty did not see G. G. walking smartly along the pavement and vanishing between the granite columns of the entrance to the hotel. She only knew he had arrived, when, a card being brought up-stairs, Mrs. Wharton jumped from her sofa and ran to the mirror, to tie a ribbon here, stick a breastpin there, burrow for a clean handkerchief, and shower herself with perfumery.

"Why, who is it?" Netty said, turning round from the window to stare at her aunt with soft, astonished eyes.

"It's young Gale. I wonder why he has come to Paterson? Business, I suppose."

"G. G.!" Netty's heart beat hard.

Mrs. Wharton fastened a tortoise-shell chain around her neck, and adjusted a curl at the side of her chignon. "Of course he would come to see me—he is most attentive to me, I'll say that for him," she said. "He's a good deal of a fool, but I'm glad to have anything in trousers—except a nigger waiter—to speak to!" Mrs. Wharton looked into the glass, and put a dab of powder on her nose. "You needn't come down-stairs; he didn't ask for you," she said from under the powder-puff.

The happy color was streaming into Netty's face; her hands trembled so that she had to squeeze them tight together. "He *will* ask for me!" she said to herself, joyously; and as the door slammed on Mrs. Wharton's flounces, Netty, too, ran about and tied fresh ribbons at her throat, and got out her little store of jewelry. Then she sat down palpitating, and waiting to be summoned.

Down-stairs, in the dark, narrow parlor of the hotel, all elegant in red plush, and black walnut, and long mirrors, and cold marble-topped tables, G. G. was standing, first on one foot and then on the other. He took Mrs. Wharton's voluble hand, but looked eagerly beyond her for a little figure—but no Netty followed in that rustling wake. It was hard for him to turn his expectant eyes from the door to gaze into the handsome powdered face under the gray hair; but he remembered his uncle's directions: "*Soft-soap the aunt.*" Accordingly he produced a bunch of flowers that he

"AH, MR. GALE, THE WEATHER SEEMED DREARY ENOUGH UNTIL YOU CAME!"

had been holding behind him, and said the weather was fine, "finer, I mean, than yesterday; it isn't raining so hard to-day," he added, desperately.

"Ah, Mr. Gale, the weather seemed dreary enough until you came!" said Mrs. Wharton. "Do sit down and cheer me up! This is such a lonely place. I don't know why I ever left dear Old Chester!"

G. G., knowing Mr. Thomas Dilworth, knew quite well why she had left Old Chester; but of course that was not a thing to say. "You ought to—to—to come back," he said, bowing in a way that would not have disgraced his Uncle Jim himself.

"If I only could," she sighed; "the home of my girlhood! Oh, such happy, happy days! But, alas, dear Mr. G. G., I am not free. I have a burden to bear. My husband's niece has to live with me, and of course I can't ask my brother to receive her."

"Oh," said G. G., ardently, "I am sure he would be glad to receive her; *I* should be!"—then, still obeying the captain, he added with vast significance—"*for your sake.*"

Mrs. Wharton simpered, and shook an arch finger at him: "Flatterer!"

"I mean it," George said, stoutly; he was so much in earnest he hardly stammered at all. "Indeed, I am here to ask you to come back to Old Chester, w-with me. I want you to come right to our house."

"Oh, dear Mr. G. G!" she protested; "how good you are! But the world is so censorious," she sighed. "You know once, when I was a little, tiny, tiny girl, that handsome uncle of yours—"

Without a moment's hesitation George offered up the captain: "He has repented, ma'am, he has re-re-repented. And he wants you to come to visit us—with Miss Netty—almost as much as I do."

Mattie Wharton fairly gasped with astonishment. Jim had sent his nephew to plead for him? The color rose sharply under the powder; she stammered almost as badly as G. G. himself:

"Jim—*w-wants me?*"

George Gale was shy, but he was not a fool; he said to himself: "Good Lord, I've put my foot into it! Ah," he said, trying wildly to take his foot out of it, "it is I who want you, not my uncle; I, who-who—" he floundered.

"*You!*" Mrs. Wharton said, still more astounded.

"Yes!" G. G. said, ardently. This, he thought, was the moment to bring in Netty's name, for certainly there had been enough soft-soap. "Yes; I have the greatest admiration for Miss Netty's aunt; admiration and—and affection."

"Oh, how good of you to offer to share my burdens!" she said; she was so confused by this whirligig of ideas that she really did not know what she said. Young Gale had come on his own account? In her perfectly honest amazement she drew back—but he caught at her hand.

"My affection, my esteem—" he repeated.

"But your years," she gasped; "you are so young!"

"Young? No: I am not young; I am quite old enough to be married—if you will only consent," he insisted.

"But—" she protested, dumfounded.

"Why, you yourself are but a very few years my senior," he challenged her, quite rakishly.

Mattie was silent; she knew just how many years his senior she was. Twenty-five years ago, when she was eighteen, she and Jim had parted on account of the "brat"—the brat who was now asking her to marry him! Well, what is eighteen years to a man in love? In a way, he was still a "brat"; a shy, stammering young man—young enough to be her son; but what difference did shyness and silence and youth make, compared to a home! "Oh," she said, "I do want a home!"

"You shall have it, as long as I have one myself," cried G. G.

The captain would never have known his timid pupil. George seized both the lady's hands and ogled her with bold eyes. Mattie looked into them, gulped, and without a moment's warning—put her head on his shoulder.

"I—I will," she said.

G. G.'s mouth dropped open; he looked down at the gray head under his chin, and lifted terrified hands as though to push it away.

"I will," Mattie whispered again, softly.

"Will—*what?*" the boy gasped; and slid his shoulder from under the drooping head—but it slid along, too.

"Marry you," said the widow.

In her happiness she forgot the publicity of the hotel parlor, and tried to put her arms around him; he felt her hair against his cheek, her perfumery reeked in his nostrils, her breast panted against his shoulder. The shock of it all made him absolutely dumb. He tried to speak, to loosen the clinging hands, to draw far, far away, but it was impossible. She clung to him, murmuring that she had never expected to love again—but he was so good, so chivalrous!

"Yes, G. G.; I will marry you," she said.

G. G. groaned aloud. Then he got on his feet, brushed frantically at a streak of powder on the lapel of his coat, and without a word dashed from the room.

Mrs. Wharton sat up, smoothed her hair, and wiped some very genuine tears from her eyes; "I never dreamed he was in love with me," she thought. "It is wonderful!" And yet perhaps not so very wonderful? She got up and went over to the long mirror between the windows; stiff red moreen curtains almost hid it, but she parted them, and stood for a moment looking into the shimmering darkness of the glass. "With my color," she reflected, "I must be attractive to anybody! No; age doesn't make a bit of dif-

ference." Her gray hair was really very handsome, too. Nobody could deny that.

She went up-stairs to her dingy room, so excited that she could hardly breathe.

"Netty!" she cried, her lips a little blue, and her hand on her panting heart; "I am engaged to be married!"

Netty gaped at her, speechless.

"Yes; to G. G.! Just think; he followed me here to propose to me. Oh, he urged me so, I simply couldn't refuse him. And he says he'll look after you—doesn't that show his devotion!" She rustled over to her bureau, and stood staring at the buxom reflection in the mirror. "Of course, my hair—" she began, but turned at a little sound.

Netty had burst out crying.

Although it did not actually take place in Old Chester, this was the first of our horrifying weddings—for, of course, from G. G.'s point of view, there was nothing to do but face the music. That was his Uncle Jim's first precept: "Don't howl!"—in other words, face the music. He had made a fool of himself—he must take the consequences. Just at first, he tried his terrified best to evade them. . . . He went back to the Eagle House that evening to say—well, he really didn't know what he meant to say. In point of fact, he did not get the chance to say anything. Mattie, coy, palpitating, effusive, said everything for him; and

the first thing she said was that they had better be married at once.

G. G. gasped. Could Jim Williams's nephew slap the female cheek thus held out to him?

"I didn't suppose I could love again," said Mattie; "but if you prefer me, with my *prematurely* gray hair, to younger and more foolish persons, why should I hesitate? I will dye, if you don't like it."

The threat made him shiver. "No—no," he stammered; "you mustn't think of anything like that; "only I—I—"

"I love you," Mattie said—and very likely she did. Women of forty-three have been known to think "anything in trousers" attractive. "I suppose you'll give me no peace unless I promise to be married at once?" she said, archly. "Oh, I know you gentlemen!" she added, shaking her finger at him.

Mattie was very arch. Did she know the truth? One wonders! We were never able to make up our minds about that. Certainly, when she accepted Netty's lover she honestly supposed he was her own; G. G. himself never doubted the sincerity of that belief. But Mattie was too astute a person to be fooled very long, and when she said, ardently, that she supposed she must submit to his impatience she must by that time have been aware of the actual state of affairs. At any rate, her haste implied that she was afraid to let him out of her sight. She betrayed this

when she said something shrewish about Jim Williams: "That naughty uncle of yours might try to separate us; he is very dear and handsome, but I must say he is just a tiny, tiny bit jealous! I noticed it in Old Chester."

G. G. bit his finger-nail speechlessly.

"Because, you know, when I was just a little, tiny girl, he was dreadfully in love with me; but I wouldn't—wouldn't—" Mattie, looking sidewise at G. G., and wondering if he knew just why she "wouldn't," did not know just how to end that sentence; so she said again, firmly, "I *wouldn't.*" Then she leaned her head on his shoulder and whispered, "We can be married here, and go back to Old Chester after our wedding trip."

G. G. had had chivalry enough to "face the music," but he had no voice to say "Yes." He only nodded, and took his hat and went out.

Mrs. Wharton herself attended to details; she got the license, and found out where the minister lived, and bought (fearfully, for sometimes it turns your hair green); a bottle of Dr. Hounard's hair-restorer. "I'll try it on a back lock," she said to herself; and hid the bottle from poor little crushed Netty.

G. G. did not see Netty in the two days before the wedding. Her tears had roused Mrs. Wharton's jealousy to an extraordinary degree, and she said, brutally, that the girl could keep to herself.

"We don't want you," said Mrs. Wharton; "and I don't know anybody who does!" Netty cried silently. "As for your future," her aunt meditated, "he's very generous, and I am sure he'll give you an allowance. He is perfectly crazy about me, and will do anything for me. He said he would share the burden of you."

"He needn't trouble himself!" said Netty, the angry color burning her tears away in a flash. She did not go to the minister's with the bride and groom; perhaps if she had G. G. might somehow have escaped from the coil. But she did not appear, and Mattie and the "brat" were pronounced man and wife.

When Mrs. Gale, returning to her room to dress for her wedding journey, looked keenly into the mirror, she could not help simpering with pleasure. She was certainly handsome, despite her still undyed hair; and, "if he prefers my experience and knowledge to the flightiness of some silly girl, who can blame him?" she said to herself again.

But all the same she made up her mind that he should not be exposed to the allurement of flightiness. "Netty can hunt up some of her own relations," she told her husband. As for Netty's immediate affairs, "there is nothing to do but send her to my brother Tom until I find somebody who will take her in—somebody on whom she has a claim. She certainly has none on you!"

She said this to G. G. when they started out

on a wedding trip the details of which she had swiftly arranged. The only thing the young, dazed husband did of his own volition was to write a letter to his uncle:

When I approached the subject of marriage, Mrs. Wharton misunderstood me, and accepted me herself. She spoke as if she preferred death rather than the loss of the affection she supposed I had offered her. Of course I could not undeceive her. We were married this morning, and will return to Old Chester next week.

Your ob't nephew,

G. GALE.

Jim Williams, reading this brief and tragic letter, almost had a stroke of apoplexy. When he got his breath and stopped swearing, he said, "Mrs. Mattie Gale can 'return to Old Chester,' but I'll be damned if she returns to my house!" Then he swore some more.

"He has disgraced himself," he told Tom Dilworth, "and he'll get his deserts—saving your presence, Thomas. No; I haven't an ounce of sympathy for him. But what is going to become of that pretty creature that he has insulted?"

"My beloved sister is sending her to stay with me until some other arrangements can be made," Tom Dilworth said; he was as angry as G. G.'s uncle, but they both observed the proprieties, and did not mention to each other the name of the "lady" who had made all the trouble; they both used a certain word with regrettable frequency, but they added "it," instead of "her."

"See here," said the captain; "I won't have that child slighted—she shall come and live with me!"

Tom Dilworth raised his eyebrows: "My dear fellow, this is a censorious world, and—"

The captain broke in with the regrettable word. But of course Thomas was right.

"I'll take care of the little thing," Tom said; but he looked harassed. The Dilworths had three youngsters of their own, and not much money, so extra bread-and-butter and petticoats meant harder work for Tom and more care for his anxious Amelia.

The captain walked off, fuming and pulling his goatee. He had already sent a letter to his nephew, which made poor G. G. curl up as if he were being skinned:

> The Tavern is open to any fool who can pay his board. My house is not.
>
> J. Williams.

So, when the bride and groom (preceded by Miss Netty, sent like an express parcel to Tom Dilworth) came back to Old Chester, it was Van Horn's roof that sheltered them, just as it had sheltered G. G. when, unheralded and undesired, he had arrived in Old Chester twenty-five years before.

When the stage drew up at the Tavern door in the November dusk, G. G., extending a lax hand to his wife, assisted her to alight. "Get supper

for Mrs. Wharton," he said to Van Horn, who snickered; the late Mrs. Wharton smilingly corrected her husband. G. G. nodded dully; "For Mrs. Gale," he said. "I am going out, ma'am," he explained. And, supperless, he went straight to Jim Williams's house.

The older man, who looked really old in this last week, was evidently expecting him, for he had been pacing about the dining-room, pulling his goatee, glancing sometimes out of the window, and sometimes at the supper-table, laid very obviously for one. At G. G.'s step on the porch he became elaborately nonchalant.

"Oh, you?" he said; and, turning his back on his nephew, sat down at the table, making a great clatter with his knife and fork.

"I came, sir," said G. G., standing in the doorway behind his uncle, "to know what you want to do?"

"Do?" said the captain, buttering a slice of bread rapidly. "When? Now? Eat my supper!"

"I mean," said George Gale, "what do you want me to do?"

"I don't care a tinker's dam what you do. Hang yourself if you want to."

"I mean," G. G. persisted, calmly, "about the business. I suppose you don't want to be in business with me any longer?"

Jim poured out a glass of wine, drank it quickly, choked, spluttered, and swallowed a tumbler of water. "As for business," he said, "so long as a

man doesn't tamper with the till and attends to his job, his private honor is nothing to me. You can get out of the firm, or stay in it, just as you choose. I'm willing *to do business* with a nigger, or a Unitarian, or a homeopathist. But my table"—he upset the cream-pitcher, and sopped the flood up with a trembling hand,—"my table and my roof are for gentlemen." He slashed at the cold meat on his plate and set his teeth.

G. G. put on his hat and stepped back into the hall. The captain, sitting tensely, his fork halfway to his mouth, heard the boy fumbling at the knob of the front door. The door opened—slammed shut. Jim was on his feet with a bound; he flung up the dining-room window and roared after the vanishing figure:

"George!"

G. G. did not turn. The captain put a leg over the low sill and called again. He could hear the retreating steps among the dead leaves.

"George! You ass!" he said; and, leaping out of the window into Ann's bed of heliotrope, all wilted and blackened by the frost, he ran, napkin in hand, down the path. Catching up to G. G. at the gate, he clapped him on the shoulder. "Don't be a bigger donkey than you have to be," he said. "Come back."

There was a moment's hesitation; then G. G. turned. Jim preceded him; they stepped across the heliotrope-bed, each put a leg over the window-

sill, and both sat down at the table, set so carefully for one.

"Ann!" James Williams called, loudly, "bring Mr. G. G. his supper!" As the old woman came in with another plate and knife and fork, the senior partner said, briefly, "How soon will they ship the condenser?"

There was no apology on either side, but after a long talk about business there was one explanatory moment:

"Van Horn will make you comfortable?"

G. G. nodded.

"As for that—that *woman*," Williams began, but George Gale interrupted him.

"That lady is my wife. We will not refer to her, sir."

The captain looked down at his plate silently; then he leaned over and struck G. G. on the shoulder. "Damn it, you're a man," he said, huskily. "Well," he added, "hereafter we'll shinny on our own side. That's understood."

It was understood. So far as G. G. could remember, the captain never attempted to shinny on his nephew's preserves. That was the first and last time Mattie was ever referred to between them. But Netty was referred to. . . .

"G. G.," said the captain one day, some months after Old Chester's first horrifying wedding, "in my youth I endeavored to give you an aunt. I failed. In my old age I am more fortunate."

G. G. was working very hard in those days,

and perhaps he was more than usually dull; at any rate, he only looked up at his uncle and blinked. He asked no questions, and no further information was offered. So that the next morning, when Old Chester buzzed with astonishment at an announcement in the *Globe*, G. G. was apparently as surprised as anybody else:

Married: At the Rectory, Miss Annette Brown to Captain James Williams.

Mattie Gale, in bed, in curl-papers, reading the paper over her late and uncomfortable breakfast-tray, cried out with astonishment; then gasped and put her hand on her side, and called to Mrs. Van Horn.

When she got her breath she burst into floods of tears; "Oh, the little minx!" she said. When George came home to dinner, she demanded, viciously, "What do you think of it? Everybody is perfectly horrified! He is thirty years older than she is. I call it disgusting. I bet anything she forced him into it!"

There was a moment's pause; then her husband looked at her. "A *young* woman doesn't have to do that," he said, slowly. Of course it was outrageous of him, but it was the only time in their whole polite and dismal married life that the worm turned. As for the woman who deserved those stabbing words, she blanched into silence.

George Gale never took anybody into his confidence in regard to his opinion of his uncle's mar-

riage—the second of our horrifying weddings;—unless, perhaps, two words to Jim Williams might be called confidential. The morning that the news came out, Jim had put a copy of the *Globe* down on his nephew's desk, and pointed a big finger at the notice.

"Something had to be done," he said. "You couldn't; so I had to. She couldn't stay on at Tom's; Amelia means well, but the little creature saw she was a burden, and was worrying herself to death."

G. G. got up from his office-chair and stood perfectly silent, looking at his boots. Then he put out his hand. His uncle grasped it, and they shook hands. When George sat down again he worked at the big ledger nearly an hour without speaking. Then he looked over his shoulder and said, "*Thank* you, sir."

After that, business—which may be done with a nigger or a Unitarian or anybody else—absorbed them both.

In the next few years G. G. came often to his uncle's house, and he and his "aunt" were very simple and honest friends; but Netty never called on her "niece," nor did Mrs. Gale ever see her "uncle" when she chanced to pass him in the street.

. . . If we knew about the future, betting would, of course, lose its interest; yet if Old Chester had only taken the odds on those two deplorable weddings it would have been money in its pocket!

Mrs. George Gale died within the year, so that her marriage did not have time to turn out badly —at any rate so far as the public knew, for G. G., who had "taken off his hat to a lady," never howled; he may not have "told the truth" about his wedding, at least to Old Chester, but certainly he accepted his "damning" like a Spartan. Jim and his little girl lived as amicably as an old dog and puppy for five or six years more.

Then one day Jim, who had been laid up for two or three months with confounded rheumatism, had a talk with Dr. Willy King. . . . At the end of it he whistled.

"Sure of it, Willy?"

Willy looked very much upset. "I'm afraid so, James."

"Jiminy!" said the captain, gravely. "Queer. I never thought of that. I suppose I expected to live for ever."

He lived a month. His little girl cried her heart out in those last days, and he watched her with his kind, amused eyes. At the very end he said a word or two to G. G.:

"Your turn, George. Turn about's" . . . His voice flagged; G. G. put his ear to the failing lips: "fair play."

And George, very tearful, blowing his nose hard, stammered out something that sounded like:

"*Th-thank* you, sir."

THE HARVEST OF FEAR

THE HARVEST OF FEAR

I

WHEN it comes to bombshells, there are few that can be more effective than that small, flat, frail thing, a letter. Its destructive potentialities cannot be guessed from its exterior. No ominous tick or pungent odor betrays it. It does not hide in secret places; it shows itself openly, lawfully, in a pigeonhole in the post-office, on the desk in a shop. It falls through the slit of the hall letter-box, and lies among its harmless brethren —bills, or invitations, or news of other people's affairs. How innocent it looks, how unimportant! . . . Then, in an instant—disaster! ruin! the House of Life falling about our ears! A man opens that non-committal oblong—and the underpinnings of existence crumble: his partner has committed suicide, his wife has eloped, his child—

It was news of his child that broke Lewis Halsey's life into ugly ruins. The bombshell lay on the breakfast-table. The two Halsey girls—so-called at thirty-five and forty—had not yet taken their seats; it would never have occurred to them to sit down to breakfast before their father, and

it never occurred to their father to be prompted on their account. Had he suddenly displayed such consideration, these two ladies would not have known what to make of it. It was a matter of course that he should do as he pleased about his meals, about their own meek lives, about everything—except, indeed, about their brother Nicholas; he had never done as he pleased with Nick. In confidential moments the two sisters, a little awed at their temerity in saying as much even to each other, admitted that dear father had never ruled Nick. But parental arrogance, or authority—Nick used one word and his sisters the other—did not trouble the Misses Halsey. In his own house Lewis Halsey was as amiable as a well-gorged tiger. He was very good to his daughters—as long as they told the truth and let their wishes run with his will. Deceit in any form roused his contempt to a degree that made the expression of it quite shocking to feminine ears. As for his will—the ladies of his household knew its quality too well to tamper with it. They had learned their lesson some twenty years before. Sadie, then, had kicked over the traces for a few weeks, about some young jackass who had had the audacity to write a love-letter to her; by accident her surreptitious answer fell into her father's hands, and his outburst of anger left her completely and permanently a coward. "I don't care for that kind of a son-in-law, thank you!" said Lewis Halsey; and he added, complacently,

"I think this will be the last deceit practised under *my* roof!" About the time that he broke the will of his oldest child he squelched that of his younger daughter, which had been to go to a woman's college. "We'll have no blue-stockings, my dear, if you please. A girl's business is to be agreeable in her home, and she doesn't need to speak the dead languages to do that!" Then he applied to educated women Dr. Johnson's remark about the dog standing on his hind legs. Sylvia yielded instantly. She never spoke of Vassar again; instead, she crept into Dr. Lavendar's study one evening, and asked him to give her Greek lessons.

"Bless your heart!" the old minister said, rather startled; "I don't look in my Greek Testament a dozen times a year—to my shame I say it." But when, timidly, she urged a little, he said: "Well, come along; every Saturday, after Collect Class. It will sharpen up my wits."

When Lewis Halsey realized that she was going to the Rectory rather frequently he was annoyed. (He was a Presbyterian,—at least he owned a pew in the Presbyterian church in Upper Chester, and saw to it that his girls sat in it.)

"See here, Sylly," he said; "is Dr. Lavendar proselytizing?"

"Oh no, sir; he is just giving me Bible lessons," Sylvia said, breathlessly. She did not add that the New Testament was her Greek Reader. Her father frowned.

"Bible lessons? Are you sure there's no prayer-book nonsense?"

And Sylvia, with scarlet cheeks and down-dropped eyes, said, "Oh no, sir!"

Except in the matter of lovers and education, his daughters did not know that they were not very well off. He told them that they were, often enough! And sometimes he reminded them of their short-lived rebellions: "I brought you down on your haunches, my dears," he would say; and they, reddening painfully, would give a deprecating little laugh: "Oh, now, father!" Occasionally he complimented them on their characters or accomplishments, for both of which he gave himself the credit: "I brought you two up to tell the truth. Women are naturally deceitful, but you two girls are as straight as George Washington!" As for accomplishments: "You make as good a sangaree and as good a julep as I could myself, Sadie," he told his elder daughter, who blushed with pleasure. Sylvia, he said, had brains enough to read aloud very well; so he let her exercise them by reading him to sleep night after night.

But really and truly, Lewis Halsey treated his daughters quite as kindly as he did his dogs, and a little more personally than his horses, even his shining bay mare, Betty. On this particular morning, when the bombshell burst in the Halsey family, the two ladies could have wished he was less kind to his dogs, for Rover and Watch had

tracked much snow into the house on their way up-stairs to wait outside their master's door; when they should hear the stropping of the razor to the tune of "Old Hundred" they would sniff at the threshold with whimpering cries, their muscles taut with readiness to leap upon him with wet caresses.

"I wish dear father wouldn't have the dogs come in on snowy days," Miss Sarah Halsey said. "Ellen has just wiped the front stairs, and they will track them all up. She will be cross if I tell her to clean them again."

"Ellen is never cross about anything father does," Miss Sylvia said; "but perhaps one of us had better wipe the stairs."

Her sister assented. It did not occur to them to keep the dogs out.

With daughters like this, and servants and dogs who adored him, of course Lewis Halsey was amiable in his own house. Even those of us who are tigers, would be amiable under such conditions. He was amiable outside of his own house, for Old Chester had no occasion to cross him. So as it happened, very few people knew that he had claws. He was exceedingly agreeable, and full of careless generosities; he had genial, though rather stately manners; to be sure, he drank more than was good for him, but in those days many men did that. He was a big man, with a red face which would have been gross but for large, dark eyes and an eagle nose that was full of power. He told a good

story well, and an improper story better; he was just, he was honest, and he never lied.

With all these good qualities, of course Old Chester liked him; and his girls lapped his hand, so to speak.

On this bright winter morning the two red setters, their soft paws making tracks all over the clean stairs, trotted up to wait outside his bedroom door, and his daughters walked about the dining-room, looking wistfully at the breakfast-table. The arrival of the letters gave them something to do and helped them to forget the pangs of hunger. Sarah opened the bag and sorted out the rather limited mail. The *Spirit of Missions* came first.

"That's for you, Sylly. Here's a letter for father—oh, Sylvia, it's from Nick! And here's one for me. I wonder who it's from?" The one vital moment in Miss Sarah's life had followed a letter, so to her the mail-bag stood for Possibility. She turned the unknown letter over and over, studied the postmark, showed it to Sylvia, speculated as to who the writer could be, and finally opened it. It was from nobody in particular, but it had given her a thrill of expectation, and it served to pass the time.

"I hope Nick won't say anything disagreeable in his letter," Miss Sylvia murmured, turning a page of her magazine; "his last one, with all that music talk, did vex papa so. Sadie, it says that women in Asia Minor—"

"Oh, I hope he won't," her older sister sighed. They were gentle creatures, these two ladies, who wanted their breakfast, but who never dreamed of eating it, and whose sun rose and set in their brother Nicholas. He was Romance to them, he was Adventure, he was Life!—Life, which they had never tasted for themselves. And he had never buckled down to dear father.

"There's papa!" said Miss Sylvia, in a flurried way. There was a joyous bark in the upper hall, and a scuttle of paws; then a hearty voice said, "Get out of my way, you rascals!" And Lewis Halsey, humming loudly,

"Glorious things of thee are spoken!"

came down-stairs, Rover and Watch imperiling his neck at every step.

As he entered the dining-room, each daughter offered a dutiful cheek for his morning kiss, and made furtive efforts to avoid the moist exuberance of the dogs.

"Good morning, my dears! Good morning!" Lewis Halsey said, pinching Sylvia's ear. "Sadie, if your coffee isn't better than it was yesterday, I shall find another boarding-place!"

The two ladies, fluttering along beside him to the table, laughed. They always laughed at papa's jokes.

"I do hope it's good this morning, dear father," Miss Sarah said, her mild, prominent eyes full

of anxiety; "but it has been standing quite a while—"

"That fool in the kitchen ought not to make it until I'm ready for it," he said, good-naturedly. Neither of his daughters answered; it would not have occurred to them to say that as the fool did not know the moment of readiness, she could not make the coffee for that moment. Instead, Sylvia brought a bottle from the sideboard, and, pouring the whisky into his glass, said, as she said every morning, "Say when, sir!" And he made his daily witticism: "Come! Come! Not so much! Do you want me to fill a drunkard's grave?"

The dining-room in the Halseys' pleasant old house was especially pleasant that morning; the girls remembered it afterward, crying in a subdued way at the mere recollection of the contrast —the friendly dogs sitting on either side of their master, the big room, with its heavy, old-fashioned furniture, the soft-coal fire sputtering cheerfully in the grate, the sunshine making the crimson rep curtains in the two long windows glow like blood, and beyond them the glittering white winter landscape; then *crash!*

It was the bombshell—Nick's letter. His father's face had hardened at the sight of it. It always hardened at any mention of Nicholas—Nicholas, whose birth had taken his mother's life, and who had been a thorn in his father's flesh ever since he was out of petticoats. Mr. Halsey took the bomb-

"HIS NAME IS NOT TO BE MENTIONED HEREAFTER UNDER MY ROOF"

shell up carelessly enough, and slit the envelope with his penknife. His daughters watched him furtively; then glanced at each other, trembling, for the change in his face as he read his son's communication frightened them. The color fell out of his cheeks, then returned in a rush of purple. Little beads of foam gathered in the corners of his mouth. But he was silent. He put the letter down and drank his coffee.

"Bring me that bottle," he said. The girls flew to get it. There was no joke about a drunkard's grave now. He poured out a great drink and swallowed it at a gulp. Then, still in silence, he read his son's letter again. His daughters stared at him, breathless with fright. At last he laid the carelessly scrawled sheet down, and putting his elbow on the table, leaned his chin in his hand; only so could he control its tremble of rage.

"Your brother," he began, and the two women started at the dreadful voice· "your brother is dead—"

Miss Sarah gave a faint scream, but Sylvia put her hand on her arm. "He doesn't mean that," she said, under her breath. He did not mean it; what he meant was worse to the two poor sisters than death.

"He is dead to me. He is dead so far as this house is concerned. His name is not to be mentioned hereafter under my roof."

Then softly, his face purple, he said a few very

terrible and blasphemous words. "You may read the letter, if you want to," he said, and flipped it half-way across the table. "He has married a servant-girl. The woman is a—" He ended the sentence with an outrageous word, and rose. Watch sprang up, too, and, capering in front of him, was suddenly and violently kicked; his yelp of pain made Sarah burst out crying. Then the door slammed.

Somehow or other, sobbing and shaking, the two ladies—crimson to their modest temples from that last word—reached for the letter, and read it, pressing close together as if for support under the shock of its contents. And indeed they were a shock: Nick was married; the lady was Miss Gertrude Estey; she had been a servant in the hotel in which he had lived, and she was a Roman Catholic. He wished his family to know, he said, that he had himself become a Catholic.

That was all. . . .

It was enough! It was a sort of last straw upon the accumulation of angers which for years had been slowly building between the father and son. Nicholas was always doing impossible things. At school he was in constant hot water; as a youth, in direct disobedience to his father's command, he enlisted, and served in the ranks until the war was over; when he was twenty-one, instead of following in his Presbyterian father's very successful legal footsteps, he insisted, passionately, on studying for the Episcopal ministry. "Why

stop at the Half-Way House? Why not go over to Rome, and be done with it?" Lewis Halsey had sneered at him. But hardly had his sisters grown used to their pride in his choice of a profession, and his father succeeded in swallowing his disappointment about the Law and his displeasure at Dr. Lavendar for "influencing" the lad—as he chose to believe the old minister had done—than, with much talk of beliefs and disbeliefs, of sincerity and truth, Nick threw over the profession of theology and went on the stage. "I should prefer a circus," his father wrote him, with angry contempt; "it isn't quite as low as a theater, for in the ring you can at least associate with horses."

Mr. Halsey always felt that Dr. Lavendar deserted him at this distressing time, for he refused, up and down, to urge Nicholas to stick to theology. "I'll tell him what I think of the theater, if you want me to. 'Course I don't want him to go on the stage! But I won't urge him to enter the ministry," he said, quietly.

"It strikes me that you blow hot and cold, sir. A year ago you were all for the cloth!"

"My dear sir," said Dr. Lavendar, "the profession of the ministry is like matrimony: if it is possible for you to keep out of it, it's a sign that you've no business to go into it! Come, come, Mr. Halsey! Nick will find his own line one of these days; this stage-struck business won't last."

It did not. Perhaps through the young man's lack of success, perhaps through dismayed disgust at the actualities of his art, the stage was even more temporary than the pulpit. At any rate, he left the boards before his father's opposition had hardened into permanent anger. Since then—he was not quite thirty-three—he had knocked about in various businesses, always passionate over this or that spiritual quality, always in debt, but never in disgrace. In fact, his personal life was rather more upright than that of most men of that somewhat loose-moraled time. Perhaps if he had not been so immaculate, his father would have got along with him better. Dissipation Lewis Halsey could have dismissed with "boys will be boys"; a fellow-feeling makes for family peace, and Halsey, Sr., had been a "boy" himself.

So, ever since his son had become a man, their relation had been one of chronic irritation. But there was no "irritation" that winter morning when the bomb exploded in the dining-room. There was no desire to say "boys will be boys." To marry the—Lewis Halsey had said the unspeakable word before his two reddening and paling daughters. His son was a fool; he added, in profane detail, just what kind of a fool—until the two ladies had to put their trembling hands over their ears. Then he had kicked Watch, slammed the dining-room door after him, and in the hall the sisters heard him thundering at

Ellen, who was cleaning the stairs for the second time:

"Get out of my way! What do you mean by leaving a bucket on the stairs! Don't you know better? Go out to the stable, and tell that idiot, George, to bring the sleigh to the front door, instantly!"

His daughters, holding their breath, heard Ellen flying down the hall. "She'd have given notice, if I had reproved her about leaving her bucket on the stairs," Miss Sarah whispered.

The "idiot" in the stable brought the sleigh to the door in the twinkling of an eye; but he had to stand in the snow, beating his arms across his chest in a vain effort to keep warm, for nearly half an hour before his master appeared. Then Lewis Halsey clambered into the sleigh, tucked the buffalo robes about his feet, lashed Betty across the flanks, and was off with a jerk that nearly threw him out of the sleigh. "He's the devil!" George said, admiringly. . . .

It was an hour or two before the sisters were composed enough to go over to the Rectory and pour out their hearts to Dr. Lavendar; when they did they were surprisingly comforted:

"As for her religion, if it has made her a good woman, it's been a good religion for her. And as Nick loves her, she must be a good woman. Trust Nick!"

"But she was a—she's common," Sylvia said.

"Common?" said Dr. Lavendar. "Well, wasn't

it the *common* people who heard Him gladly? If she has done that, she may be uneducated, but she isn't vulgar. Trust your brother, Sylvia!"

There was nobody to tell Lewis Halsey to trust his son, and he would not have done so if he had been told. But the long, cold drive to Upper Chester steadied the whisky-jangled nerves, and when he reached his office—a little, old, brick building with a white-pillared doorway—and sat down at his desk, he was able to write to Nick quite calmly. His letter was a brief statement of his opinion of the young man's conduct, coupled with an insulting reference to his wife; it ended with a single piece of information:

> I am making a new will; there is no lawyer this side of hell smart enough to break it. You and your servant-girl can starve, so far as my money goes.

Mr. Halsey did not practise in Old Chester—there was nothing to practise upon. Mr. Ezra Barkley did our conveyancing, and drew our wills and witnessed our signatures. If Nick's father had waited for Old Chester cases, the bequeathing of his property would not have been a matter of much importance to Nick; but as it was, he was one of our few rich men. He took his time over that will; it was a week before it was strong enough. But the letter did not take five minutes.

Nicholas's reply was like an echo—for at bottom he was his father's son! Mr. Halsey read it

at the breakfast-table, watched again by the anxious sisters; this time he did not throw the letter to them to read.

It was short, but long enough to hold outrageous retorts; in addition to the retorts, Nicholas vouchsafed to say that the lady "of *unblemished* reputation" who had honored him by marrying him was as indifferent to the opinion of his family as he was himself. Furthermore, so far as her religion (and his) went—he now, for the first time in his life, had reached spiritual peace and intellectual certainty.

"Spiritual hog-wash!" Mr. Halsey said; "and intellectual mendacity. Well, it's nothing to me. He can turn Mormon, if he wants to." He tore the page across twice, and threw the scraps under the table.

His daughters had seen the letter in the mail-bag before he came down to breakfast, and had speculated in scared undertones as to its contents; but after that outburst they dared not ask what Nick had said. Lewis Halsey had quite regained his composure since that dreadful day a week before when the news of the marriage had come. This morning he was his usual carelessly amiable self; he had stropped his razor, with loud cheerfulness, to:

> "Let every kindred, every tribe,
> On this terrestrial ball—"

Still humming, he took his seat at the table,

but did not open his mail until he had fed the dogs, said the coffee was good, and tossed each lady a five-dollar bill. The Misses Halsey had unlimited credit in Old Chester, but no bank-accounts. If either sister wanted to buy a postage-stamp, their father's generosity had to be appealed to. It was never denied, and very often, unasked, he gave one or the other of them a bill, just as he would throw a bone to Watch or Rover.

When he threw the two greenbacks across the table that rainy January morning, each lady made a dive for the fluttering benefaction, and both said, ardently, "Oh, *thank* you, father!" When he hummed hymn tunes he was always in a good humor, and on this particular morning his dark eye had that amused look that they, like Rover and Watch, knew meant bones or bills, so it had seemed to them (making little signs to each other that his temper was all right) a propitious moment to refer to Nicholas. But before they could do so he opened his mail, and made that comment on Nick's letter; so they hesitated. An hour later, however, when he was shrugging into his great-coat in the hall, he was entirely good-humored again. He told Sylvia, who was scarlet with excitement, that she ought to get a bonnet to match her cheeks. Then he pinched her ear, and took up his umbrella and green bag.

So Sylvia began: "Did Nick— Is he— I mean, are you—"

The good humor slipped off like a cloak; Lewis

Halsey's face was suddenly leaden; he opened the front door as though he had not heard what was said, then turned back and stood on the threshold, letting the icy wind blow in upon the two ladies.

"Listen, please; your brother has made his bed, and I've made my will; he can lie in his work, and I'll die in mine. Not another question about him! And let me tell you this, you two: you can't give him any of my money when I'm dead. If you try to, you'll cancel your own share of the estate. And you will have nothing to do with him while you condescend to live in my house. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Sylvia faltered; "we—understand."

"Very well," he said. He went down the steps, but paused before he got into his buggy, to stroke Betty's shining flank. "Get me some sugar, girls!" he called to the shivering ladies who were hugging their elbows on the door-step; and when Betty's soft nose was slobbering the palm of his hand, he told George that, confound him! he wasn't looking after her hocks as he should. "What do I pay you for, you loafer?" he inquired, good-naturedly—and flung the man a cigar. George grinned, and watched the swiftly retreating vehicle with worshipful eyes.

The two ladies, each conscious of the greenback in her pocket, would no doubt have looked worshipful, too, but for the remembrance of that torn sheet of paper under the dining-room table. It was Sylvia who picked up the scraps and began

to put them together. Miss Sadie walked about, twisting her hands nervously. "Oh, Sylly, ought we to? If father didn't want us to read it—it seems deceitful."

"He didn't say he didn't want us to read it, and we didn't say we wouldn't," the younger sister parried, spreading the scraps out on the table. She paled as, piecemeal, she read her brother's words; the older sister refused to look at them, but she listened.

"Oh, Nicholas ought not to say such things to father!" she said.

"But think what father must have said to him!" Sylvia said, panting with anger. "I am going to write to Nick," she declared, as she gathered up the bits of paper and threw them into the fire. She looked like her father for a moment, her black eyes brilliant with unshed tears, and her cheeks scarlet. "I am going to write to Nick, now, this very minute!"

"Oh, my dear," faltered the older sister; "you told father we wouldn't have anything to do with dear Nick."

"No, I didn't; I told him we 'understood'; and so we do!"

"But he meant to write to him, or—"

"I can't help what he meant," Sylvia said, coldly. "I know what I said. I do 'understand.' I understand too well!" And she whirled away to her own room to write the letter. It was very brief:

DEAR NICK,—We are so grieved. We hope you will be happy. Dear father is so displeased. We are so unhappy.

SYLVIA.

Then a postscript:

If she only makes you happy, nothing else matters.

She kept her handkerchief in her left hand all the time that she was writing, and when the letter was finished the handkerchief was a tight, damp ball.

"Read it, sister," she said. Miss Sarah read it, her weak chin quivering.

"You are very brave, Sylvia. I couldn't do it—though I love dear Nick just as much as you do! But, oh, Sylly, it does seem deceitful."

"If it is, it is father's fault for making us do it this way," the younger sister said, stubbornly. Yet, for all her stubbornness, the habit of obedience made her very wretched. And that afternoon, on a sudden impulse, she put on her things and went out into the rainy mist. "I'm going to see Dr. Lavendar," she said, when Miss Sadie expostulated. "I know he'll say I'm doing right."

The old man was not at home, and she had a melancholy hour, waiting in the study. It had begun to rain heavily, and the room was growing dark; the fire had crawled back into a corner of the grate, and now and then blinked a red eye at her. Mary looked in once, doubtfully, as though debating whether it was safe to leave her with the silver candlesticks or even the books,

and once Danny came and sniffed her knees, but upon reflection he accepted her, and, curling up in Dr. Lavendar's chair, went to sleep.

When the old minister came in, rather chilled, Mary was very stern with him, bustling around, and talking about hot whisky.

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Lavendar; "tea is the thing for old maids like you and me, Mary; only Miss Sylvia and Danny like whisky at this hour of the day. Sylvia! Stop!" he called to her, for she was slipping out of the room; "what are you hurrying off for? Mary, get my slippers. Daniel, if you don't give me my chair—!" Danny yawned and scrambled reluctantly to the floor. "Well, Sylvia, my dear, what's the matter? Something wrong?"

She nodded; her lip was too unsteady for speech. Dr. Lavendar sat down, laid his hand on hers, and waited.

"Is it ever right to be disobedient?" Sylvia said at last, swallowing hard and wiping her eyes.

"After you cease to be an infant in the eyes of the law—and I rather think *you* have," said Dr. Lavendar, smiling, "there is only one disobedience for you to consider."

"To—father?" she said, faintly.

"To your Heavenly Father, Sylvia."

She pondered a moment. "You mean to what *I* think is right?"

"Yes, my child."

She brightened up at that. "Dr. Lavendar,

father said we must have nothing to do with Nick. But I've written to him,"—she showed him the letter clutched in her nervous hand.

"I am glad of it, Sylvia."

"But father doesn't know."

"Tell him!"

She shrank back in her chair. "Oh, I'm afraid! You don't know him, Dr. Lavendar. We are—we are just like slaves, Sadie and I."

"The truth shall make you free, Sylvia."

She looked positively terror-stricken.

"No! Oh no! I couldn't."

"My dear," he warned her, "if you give way to fear, you'll be a coward; and Sylvia"—his voice fell—"a coward is apt to be a liar. The devil's first name is Fear, Sylvia." She was silent.

"Come!" he urged her, cheerfully; "it's only the first step that is hard. Tell him to-night, and mail the letter to-morrow. He will respect you for it!"

"Well, perhaps I will," she said, vaguely—and went over to the post-office and dropped Nick's letter into the mail-box.

II

The next morning, in Dr. Lavendar's study, little grizzled Danny growled; and the old minister, looking up, growled too, under his breath. It was Saturday morning, his sermon was still

unwritten—and here was Lewis Halsey! . . . "I'll hear the other side now, I suppose," he said to himself; "only there isn't any other side."

"I'm interrupting you, I'm afraid," the lawyer said, in his genial way; "you were writing your sermon, sir?"

"Well, I'll turn the barrel upside down. Sit down, Mr. Halsey!"

His caller drew up a chair, put his green bag on the table, and opened his greatcoat to take some cigars from an inner pocket.

"You'll find them worthy of you, sir," he said. And added, smiling, "I don't belong to your flock, but I want you to do me a favor."

"I'll be glad to," the old man said.

"I suppose you have heard of the marriage we've had in our family?"

Dr. Lavendar nodded. "The girls told me."

"I suppose they told you some of my remarks?" the other man said, dryly. "They were not, perhaps, suited for clerical ears, but I confess they expressed my sentiments."

"My ears don't matter so much," said Dr. Lavendar, "but I'm afraid your lips suffered."

The lawyer laughed: "My lips are used to somewhat vigorous language. . . . Well! What I came to tell you, sir, is that I have ventured to name you as one of the executors of my will." He tapped the green bag on the table; "I have it here," he said. "I trust you will be willing to serve?"

Dr. Lavendar raised his eyebrows. "I appreciate the honor you do me; but I am getting on in years; you will probably outlive me."

"I may," Lewis Halsey said, "but"—he touched his left side—"I doubt it."

"Come, come!" said Dr. Lavendar. "What does Willy King say? He'll patch you up!"

"I don't consult doctors," the lawyer said; "I prefer to die a natural death."

Dr. Lavendar laughed, and said he must stand up for William. "He put me on my legs last winter. But to go back to the matter of your will: I really think you'd better choose a younger and more able man; I know nothing about business. At least, so Sam Wright tells me. Why don't you take Ezra Barkley?"

Mr. Halsey looked amused; "Ezra is an amiable old donkey, but he wouldn't answer my purpose. It really isn't a matter of business. I shall leave my affairs straight as a string. I want you, because you can keep an eye on my girls. I shall have So-and-so"—he named a lawyer in Upper Chester—"for the shaft horse. I may add, sir, that you will profit by it financially; very slightly, of course; but as an executor you will be entitled to a per cent. on the estate."

Dr. Lavendar's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean by keeping an eye on the girls, Halsey?"

"Merely this: My daughters won't like my will, and they will want to break the spirit of it—they can't break the letter! In fact, they won't

try to; my womenkind have been well brought up! They would be afraid."

"Fear is certainly a deterrent," Dr. Lavendar admitted, "but it has its drawbacks."

"I don't know of any."

"Deceit comes out of it, as naturally as a chicken out of an egg. Did it ever occur to you that every lie that was ever told, had its root in some kind of fear?"

"My girls have never deceived me," the lawyer said, carelessly; "as for fear, if I may quote Scripture"—perhaps a retort trembled on Dr. Lavendar's lips as to Someone else who is given to such quotation; if so, he suppressed it;—"if I may quote Scripture to one of your profession, I would remind you that the '*fear* of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'"

The old clergyman nodded. "Yes; but only the beginning! If we stopped at fear we should never attain wisdom. And perhaps you are sufficiently familiar with the Scriptures to recall what perfect love does to fear?"

Lewis Halsey bowed, a little ironically. "I don't argue with a man about his own business! I only meant to explain why I wanted you as an executor. The girls will try to evade the spirit of my will, but you, as their spiritual adviser—for I am quite aware that as soon as I am out of the way they will forsake the faith of their fathers and go to your church—you will keep them from such undutiful conduct."

Dr. Lavendar was silent.

"My will," Lewis Halsey went on, "disinherits —the man who has disgraced my name. It is very explicit. In fact," he said, his face lighting with wicked satisfaction, "as I have told the girls, there is no lawyer this side of hell smart enough to break it."

The old minister looked at him sadly. "Halsey," he said, "do you realize that only a lawyer already in hell would make such a will? You hate your own son! And hate is hell."

The other man made a gesture of smiling impatience. "Perhaps we need not discuss it."

"It is not open to discussion," said Dr. Lavendar, gravely.

"Ah, well, you have a right to your opinion—your professional opinion, I suppose. I won't contradict you. As to the will, the fellow and his para—"

"Sir!"

"His wife," the lawyer substituted—much to his astonishment, for Lewis Halsey was not in the habit of changing his words to please his listeners. "So far as I am concerned, the fellow will not get a cent to spend on his church and his—his wife. I leave the money to the girls (the principal tied up, of course) for their lifetime; after that it is to revert—but I won't trouble you with details; I will merely say that their brother won't get it! That's what my will is, sir. I wished you to know it, and to understand why I have named you as

one of the executors. You have a great deal of influence over my daughters. You see, though I can tie up the principal, I can't keep them from spending the interest in ways which would"—his voice was suddenly violent, and his hand clenched on the arm of his chair—"which would be obnoxious to me! It is hard on a lawyer, Dr. Lavendar, to have Law fail him, and be obliged to resort to Religion to make sure that his wishes are carried out."

"Halsey," said Dr. Lavendar, abruptly, "destroy this will! Here—now! Let us burn it up. It will feed the flame upon the altar!" With an impulsive gesture he touched the bag on the table.

"None of that!" the other man said, sharply, and thrust the wrinkled old hand aside. Danny growled. The lawyer was instantly apologetic: "I beg your pardon, sir, but you startled me."

"My plea was not for Nick," Dr. Lavendar said; "I am not concerned about him."

"Oh, you were not?" the lawyer said, rather blankly. "Why, I supposed—"

"It won't hurt Nick to earn his living," the old man explained. "Good for him! Good for everybody. My objection is to the injury you are doing yourself."

Lewis Halsey interrupted him, smiling. "If you please!—I do not mean to be discourteous, sir, but I know my own business."

Dr. Lavendar rose and took a turn about the room, which gave Danny the opportunity to

scramble up into his chair. Then he came back and stood looking down at the big, red-faced man.

"And you think," he said, "that I will influence your daughters against their brother?"

"No, not exactly that," said the lawyer; "you will merely make it clear to them that they would be violating my wishes if they spent the income from my money on—on those two persons."

"I see," said Dr. Lavendar.

"Women," the other man explained, "are naturally religious—and lawless. If a father can get the balance true, he can ride as safely as John Gilpin with his bottles. I have looked after the law, but I want you to supply the other 'curling ear.' Your church still holds, I believe, to the Ten Commandments. The fifth is explicit, and I shall rely upon you not to let my girls forget it."

"Has it occurred to you," said Dr. Lavendar, "that I might make it clear to them that their father, in this particular, does not deserve the honor which the Commandment inculcates?"

"No," Lewis Halsey replied, "it hasn't. You wouldn't say such an indecent thing to a man's daughters. Candidly, I have never liked you, Dr. Lavendar, but I have always trusted you."

"Oh," said the old minister, thoughtfully. "Um. Well, Halsey, I have always rather liked you, but I have never trusted you."

The lawyer got on his feet with a laugh. "Honors are even," he said, with a low bow, and put on his hat.

Dr. Lavendar lifted his hand. "Please understand: I will have no part in your iniquitous will. You must find another executor."

"Good day," Lewis Halsey said.

"Good day, sir," said Dr. Lavendar.

III

Sylvia's letter to her brother, brief as it was, went straight to Nicholas's angry heart and brought a passionately hurt reply:

You girls are all right, I know. As for him—well, *I* have some decency, and as he is my father I won't say what I think of him.

Then he burst out about his wife: she was an angel of goodness and she had brought him into a church where he had at last found peace. She had helped him in a thousand ways. As for his father's will, what did he care? He could leave his money to the devil, if he wanted to—or he could take it with him, which would amount to the same thing! He (Nick) had Gertrude, who was "worth all the money in the world"!

"Sadie," Sylvia said, "we ought to write *her*."

"Oh, impossible!" said Miss Sarah, shrinking; "we told father we wouldn't."

"No, we didn't," Sylvia said, with sudden slyness. "I only said we 'understood.' Well, I shall write to her, if you won't!"

She did. It was a cold letter. It could not be

anything else, for such a marriage could only be shocking to Nick's family. Still, she did write to the new Mrs. Halsey, and the letter gave great pleasure. Nicholas answered it, because, he said, "Gert isn't much of a letter-writer; she's too busy being a good housekeeper." He inclosed a photograph of his wife, on the back of which he had written:

Gertrude Halsey: The best woman in the world!

N. H.

Below the exuberant lines, another hand had added, in round, painstaking letters:

He's just real foolish, but I just worship him, and he is the best man in the world.

G. H.

The two ladies, holding the *carte de visite* under the lamp, and studying the round, simple face, surmounted by a foolish hat, blushed at such lack of delicacy. How could she be so gushing! Ladies in Old Chester did not say they "worshiped" their excellent husbands.

"I suppose she means she is sincerely attached to him; and she is certainly pretty," Miss Sylvia admitted; "but—"

"But not a lady," the other sister murmured. And Sylvia, looking hard at the honest face, broke out:

"I don't care if she isn't a lady; she's good, and makes him happy!"

After that the correspondence became a mat-

ter of course; the only unusual thing about it was that Nick's letters never came in the letter-bag, and his sisters kept their own counsel in regard to their habit of going, once a week, to the post-office and asking if there was anything for them marked "To be called for." Except that the Misses Halsey had a new look in their gentle faces, a look of interest and happiness, and even sometimes of excitement, life in the Halsey house settled back into the old grooves. Sylvia read aloud to her father each night until her eyes saw double with fatigue, and Sadie supplemented the cook's efforts about the coffee or what not. Mr. Halsey was late for breakfast for the same cause which, in the last few years, had so often kept his daughters waiting for their morning meal; he hummed good old Presbyterian hymn-tunes as he and the dogs came down-stairs, and he took his two fingers of whisky, making his old remark about the drunkard's grave—a joke which William King told Dr. Lavendar would not be a joke if the lawyer kept the practice up much longer. He never spoke of his son; and his son, in those letters which were "called for," never spoke of him. Nick had something better to talk about—his wife! And by and by—this was when the Halsey girls were most openly excited and happy—he had his two boys to talk about! The twins were born at the end of Nick's first year of married happiness. It was Miss Sylvia who told Lewis Halsey that he was a grandfather;

Sarah, listening outside the library door, heard only a grunt; then, carelessly:

"That kind breed fast. I suppose there is an older child somewhere in the background?"

Sylvia, too simple to see the innuendo, said, "Oh no! Why, they've only been married a year—" Then she understood, and blushed hotly. She was very angry as she flew out of the room, stumbling on the threshold over her sister, who had not realized that the door was to open so quickly. She took Sarah's arm and pulled her across the hall into the parlor. "Did you hear what he said? Oh, Sadie, how cruel in him! Poor, good Gertrude! I'll never tell him another thing about them!" she declared, hotly. It was a poor little retaliation, but it was the only one she could make. She repeated her reprisal when the first photograph of the twins arrived: "He sha'n't see it!" she said, fiercely—and felt that the babies were avenged. She and Sarah brooded and fluttered over the picture, which showed two round-eyed infants, with little bald heads bobbing against each other. They didn't have Nick's looks, or even their mother's rather common prettiness; they were just two little cuddling things, but the maiden aunts were almost tearful with maternal thrills.

"If I could only *see* them!" Miss Sadie sighed, her big, mild eyes misty with happiness.

"I'd like to see her, too," Sylvia said; "I've grown really fond of her."

"She doesn't know how to spell," Miss Sarah said.

"Well, I don't myself, very well," Sylvia declared, boldly.

But of course there was no possibility of seeing Nick's wife, or the babies, either. Even if their absence from home could have been explained, the Misses Halsey had no money for a journey. The occasional generosities of the breakfast-table ought, perhaps, to have been saved up to meet some such emergency, but they were almost always sent stealthily to Gertrude to buy this or that "for the precious babies." In point of fact, Mrs. Nick spent the money for the stern necessities of rent and food quite as often as for the twins. For neither matrimony nor religion had changed Nick's nature: his church was a great comfort, and his wife a greater comfort, but he was still a rolling stone. He rolled from one business to another, and the last one was always going to be the best yet. But the intervals between the businesses grew longer. Nick kept a stiff upper lip, and loved his common Gertrude and his pudgy babies, and was tremendously happy, he told his sisters. He did not tell them that the strain and tug of trying to make a living was gradually undermining a system at best not robust, and since his marriage really delicate. It was Gertrude's letters, written in her round, painstaking hand, that made the two sisters anxious. By and by came one that terrified them:

He's that sick, I'm just scared about him. If I could take him down south maybe he'd get well; but we haven't got the money.

Sylvia's vow broke under that: "We *must* tell father! He can't refuse to help Nick now."

Miss Sarah sighed. "You don't know father."

"He'll be a murderer, if he won't help them!" cried Sylvia; and that very evening, at supper, she said, with breathless boldness: "Nick is very ill, sir. And—and they are so poor. Can't I—I mean won't you— I mean—they do need money so dreadfully, father."

Mr. Halsey put his plate down on the floor for Rover and Watch to lick, then looked at Sylvia with amused eyes. "There are many persons who need money in the world; but I don't feel called upon to supply it." Then he burst out, in a sort of scream, "Keep your mouths shut on that subject!" With an oath he pushed his chair back, so violently that it upset with a crash, and the door slammed behind him.

"Oh," said Sylvia; "oh! *oh!*" and hid her face in her hands.

"Sylly," her sister said, "there's my pearl breastpin; we can send it to Gertrude, and she can sell it."

Sylvia clutched at the idea. "So we can! And my topaz ring, too!"

The search for anything valuable among their modest possessions was a great relief to them; but the things they sent did not help Gertrude

much—poor little old-fashioned bits of jewelry: A shell cameo pin, some hair bracelets with gold clasps; "the clasps are worth something," Sarah said; and two or three rings. But it was a comfort to the sisters to give all they had. This was just at the beginning of Nick's decline. As it went on, more and more rapidly, the frightened wife threw her husband's dignity, as well as her own, to the winds, and wrote to her father-in-law for help:

He'll die unless something is done. He don't know I'm writing, but won't you please—please—*please* forgive him, and send him some money? I promise I won't spend a cent of it on me or the children.

There were two splashes on the page that might have moved Nick's father, but they did not. Lewis Halsey, two years redder, two years more sodden, two years angrier, returned the letter to her without comment.

The way Gertrude took his brutality showed the quality of the woman Nick had married. Her dignity and anger were very noble. She wrote to her sisters-in-law and told them what their father had said; she added, very simply:

He is a bad man, but he is hurting himself more than us. I am sorry for him, because he will be sorry when it is too late. When my Nick is dead he will be sorry.

Was he sorry? Who can say!

There came a day when the two sisters, weeping, went into the library. . . . Lewis Halsey had been

working at his desk, but had risen, and with his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth, was walking back and forth, thinking out a brief, and humming, cheerfully:

> "From all that dwell below the skies
> Let the Creator's praise arise—"

It was Sarah who handed him the despatch:

Nicholas is dead.—GERTRUDE.

He read it. Read it again, and handed it back. Then, without speaking, sat down at his desk and took up his pen.

"Father!" Sarah said; "oh, father, what—what shall we do?"

"I can tell you one thing to do," he said, quietly; and pointed to the door.

They fled—that pointing finger was violently compelling. They hurried out of the room, jostling against each other like two frightened pigeons, not daring to look behind them to see what he did. If they had looked they would have seen nothing but the steady movement of his pen across his paper, which certainly would not have revealed anything to them. At the end of an hour he stopped writing and glanced over his brief; then, with a shrug, tore it up and threw it in the waste-basket. Perhaps that might have revealed something.

That night, when the house had sunk into silence, Sylvia Halsey came into her sister's room;

she sat down on the foot of Sarah's bed, shading her candle with one hand. "I'm going," she said, briefly.

"Oh, Sylvia dear! You can't! How can you?" poor Miss Sarah said. She sat up in bed, her arms around her knees and her face twitching nervously in the faint light that shone through Sylvia's fingers.

"I shall say I am going to Mercer to visit—oh, anybody; I can't think who, yet. The Rogers, I guess. But I will go right through to Philadelphia. I'll only stay for—for the funeral."

"If he were to find out!"

"He can't do anything worse to me than he has to Nick. And what do I care for his money, compared to Nick! Oh—my darling Nick!" She broke down, and for a moment they both cried. "I've got to go, sister," Sylvia said, wiping her eyes; "I couldn't stay away."

"But how about the money? It will cost fifty dollars at least, and if you ask him for so much as that he'll want to know why you want it. There's no use just saying 'Mercer.' He knows you could go to Mercer and back, and do some shopping, and have fifty cents left over for the Rogers' chambermaid—for five dollars. But fifty dollars! Oh, Sylvia, it's impossible!"

"I shall get it," Sylvia said.

"How?" the other whispered, and leaned forward to hear the answer.

"I shall say I want to buy a new dress."

"But you don't!"

"Oh," said Sylvia, with somber passion, "I do—*a black one*. We have to have mourning; we only have the old crêpe veils we had when Aunt Nancy died. Oh, I know he'll give me the money—and I won't buy the dress. Sadie! I would go to Nick's funeral if I had to walk."

Miss Sarah fell back on her pillows and stared at her. "Sister!" she gasped; "but to say you are going to Mercer, when you mean to go to Philadelphia—why, Sylvia!"

"I *am* going to Mercer. There isn't any falsehood about that. I have to go to Mercer to get to Philadelphia."

Miss Sarah was speechless.

"You see, I don't say anything that isn't true. I merely don't say all that is true."

"Of course it is deceiving him."

"I can't help that."

"Oh, Sylly, ask Dr. Lavendar if it's right!"

Sylvia shook her head. "No; he might say something that would change my mind; I'll ask him—after I've done it."

Then she slipped away to her own room, and the house was silent again.

At breakfast the next morning she announced her purpose of "going to Mercer," and, paling, asked for fifty dollars: "I need a new dress, sir." Lewis Halsey was silent for a minute. Then he laughed.

"And I flattered myself that I had a white

blackbird—a truthful woman! Well," he baited her, "I'll give it to you next week."

The color flew into her face. "I want to go to Mercer to-day, father."

"It looks as if it were going to rain," he demurred, maliciously; "better wait a few days."

She was silent. "Well," he conceded, looking at her with cruel eyes, "go, if you want to. I suppose you'll take the morning stage? The afternoon coach gets into Mercer pretty late;—and the Eastern express leaves at four-thirty! Give my regards—*to the Rogers*," he said, sardonically. "As for the fifty dollars, I don't carry fifty dollars in my trousers pocket! I'll leave a check for you on my desk in the library."

He went out of the room, stumbling over the dogs, but for once not swearing at them.

"He knows!" Sarah said, clasping her trembling hands.

Sylvia nodded. "But he's going to give me the money!" They watched him, a big, black figure, go down the front door-steps, stand desolately in the sunshine, while George raised the hood of the buggy.

"He doesn't want to see people," Sarah whispered. When he drove off up the road they stole over to the library. The check lay on his writing-table.

"Oh," Sylvia said, with passionate relief, "it's for a hundred dollars—you can go, too!"

Sarah shook her head: "Give Gertrude the

other fifty to buy something for the little boys," she pleaded.

IV

Of course poor Sylvia's childish lie could not have deceived any one.

"She's going to the funeral," Lewis Halsey said to himself when he was writing the check. He smiled faintly: "The Rogers!" Sylvia was such a fool! But really he did not care much, one way or the other. "All women lie," he told himself, dully. Nicholas, whatever else he had done, had not lied. Well, Nicholas was dead. His face flushed darkly, as if some new anger sent the blood to his head. Death was Nicholas's last affront. To die, at thirty-five, with nothing achieved! Well, it was like all the rest of his career. Failure—failure! And the opportunities he had had— Backed by Lewis Halsey's ability and success, Lewis Halsey's son could have gone far. Instead—! the lawyer brought his fist down on the table with a violent word—what had he done? Disgraced himself: that wife! those children! Well, if he preferred to wallow, it was nothing to Lewis Halsey. And his death was nothing, either. But he wasn't a liar; he would say that for him; Nick wasn't a liar.

"But *she's* 'going to the Rogers'!" he said to himself, with a sudden laugh.

Then the flare of anger died, and dullness fell

upon him. He rose, heavily, and went out to stumble into his buggy; this time he had no word for Betty, and no cigar for George; his eyes were stupid and his face sodden. "He's heard the news," George told himself.

It was a beautiful June morning of rain-washed air and warm, green pastures. The sumacs and elderberry-bushes, and buttonwoods and locusts, made pleasant shadows on the road, and, after they were once out of Old Chester, Betty was allowed to take her time. Perhaps that strange, dark anger at this last injury his son had done him absorbed her master, for he let her plod along at her own gait; once she stood still to bite at a fly on her shining side, and once, delicately, like a lady holding aside her skirt, she drew over to the edge of the road to let a wagon pass. Sometimes she stopped to crop the blossoming grass growing close to the wheel-ruts. Unbidden, she paused at the watering-trough—a hollowed log, green with moss and dripping ferns—and took a long, cool drink. In Betty's dim brain there may have been some pleased astonishment that she did not feel the slap of an impatient rein. She stood there quite a long time, stamping in the mud and pebbles in front of the trough, and switching her tail so sharply that the reins caught under it and were pulled over the dashboard; they rested for a moment on the whiffletree, then dropped and dangled about her heels. Perhaps that reminded her of her duty, or else the

flies were too troublesome, for she started briskly, and trotted for a while. But on the sunny pull up-hill she lounged again and took her time. An hour later, with the tangled reins dragging on the ground, she drew up in front of the small brick building with the Doric pillars from which the white paint was flecking off, and where Lewis Halsey's name on the brass door-plate was almost obliterated by years of polishing. She stood there, rubbing her soft nose against the iron horse's head on the hitching-post, stamping, and switching at the flies, until, by and by, one of the clerks chanced to look out of the office window, and wondered at Mr. Halsey's leaving her in the heat to toss her head until the bridle lathered her sleek neck. Then, suddenly, he noticed the reins, and even as he gaped at them, wondering, he saw the dark, huddling shape that had slipped sidewise on the seat of the buggy.

"Good Lord!" Mr. Robin said, and ran bareheaded out into the blazing sunshine. "Mr. Halsey!" he called; "*Mr. Halsey?*" But even as he called he saw the still face and the fixed, open eyes. . . . Afterward the doctor said he might have been dead an hour; certainly Betty had taken her time in that pleasant walk along the shadowy, green road.

Half an hour after the clerk's discovery, while the doctor was still in the office, the morning stage from Old Chester, pulling through Upper Chester, passed the office door. A black-veiled

figure was shrinking into the corner seat, her hands clasped hard together, her breath coming quickly. She kept her head turned away as they passed the little brick building, so she did not see Betty standing at the hitching-post, nor did she notice that the front door, under its leaded fanlight, was open, and that a group of solemn people were standing, talking, about the door-steps. Not until the stage was well out of Upper Chester did Sylvia breathe freely. She had realized that her father had pierced the thin disguise of her deceit and knew perfectly well that she meant to disobey him. He was capable, she thought, of stopping the stage on the public street and dragging her back to obedience! "He would love to do it," she said to herself, panting a little behind her long crêpe veil. She was incapable, in her simplicity, of realizing that he might have been too indifferent to her and to her conduct to contend with her courage. So she passed him by, hiding in the corner of the stage.

When she reached Mercer she stopped a minute at the Rogers'. "I said I was going to see them, so I must," she told herself—poor Sylvia preferred truth! Then she went to the railroad station, hours ahead of time, and bought her ticket to Philadelphia. It was as she was pacing up and down the platform, waiting for the train to back in, that she saw Mr. Rogers hurrying toward her. He was plainly agitated, and he held something in his hand.

"My dear Miss Sylvia! I am so distressed! I—I must ask you to prepare for bad news. This despatch came to my house just a few minutes ago. It—it is bad news, my dear young lady." He let the telegram tell her the rest. It was from Sarah, begging him to find her sister at the station and tell her that their father was dead and that she must come home.

Sylvia read the despatch with dazed eyes. The sudden confusion of ideas and purposes stunned her. Her father dead? No, it was Nick who was dead. And his funeral—she must go to Nick's funeral! But her *father?* She did not understand. What must she do? She stood there, in the big, noisy, dirty Union Station, with people jostling past her, too overcome even to wipe away the tears that streamed down her face. Mr. Rogers stood beside her with patient sympathy.

"You had better take the afternoon stage back to Old Chester, dear Miss Sylvia," he said, kindly.

"But Nick?" she said; "my brother Nick? Oh, I must go to Gertrude and the babies. No, Sadie wants me! Oh, what shall I do? Oh, poor father!"

So, exclaiming and trembling, she let him lead her away; and by and by, in the late afternoon, she found herself in the stage again. She was keyed to such a pitch of courage in starting to go to her dead brother that the reaction of turn-

ing back left her almost indifferent to the terrifying news in Sarah's despatch. At first she really did not take it in; her mind was full of Nicholas, and of Gertrude—who was expecting her! It occurred to her that she ought to have telegraphed Gertrude in Mercer why she wasn't coming to the funeral. She must do it as soon as she got to Old Chester! Could she get it into ten words, she wondered; and counted the necessary words over once or twice on her fingers. She was glad she had money to pay for the despatch, because if she charged it father would know it and would be angry and— Her mind crashed against the fact! He would never be angry again. He was dead!

"*Oh!*" she said, faintly; and one of the passengers looked at her. After that, as the stage went rumbling along between the peaceful meadows and over the domed and wooded hills, she slowly realized what had happened. . . .

He must have died very, very suddenly. Perhaps in his office; perhaps, even, on his way to his office; this made her shudder—all alone! He may have fallen out of the buggy! Oh, horrible! Poor father! Was it the shock of the news about Nick? It must have been. She wished she had not spoken of him as she did to Sarah; for he may have been sorry he had been so severe? Oh, he *must* have been sorry! And now they were both dead; poor father, poor Nick!

Behind her shrouding crêpe she burst out crying.

She smothered her sobs as well as she could, but the passengers looked at her curiously, and one of them whispered to his neighbor that "that lady had bad news just before she left Mercer."

The June twilight had fallen like a perfumed veil when the stage drew up at her father's house.

V

Then came three empty days—days of lowered voices and darkened rooms and the scent of tuberoses and lilies. The bereavement, which struck at the habits of life, but was not grief, the daughters could have borne; and the silent house, the horror of the suddenness, they could have borne, too; the thing they could not bear was the thought of Nick—Nick, buried without their tears and honor! And poor Gertrude, uncomforted by a sister's sympathy; and the precious babies, all unconscious of their loss.

They talked constantly of Nicholas and his little family, and once—it was the second day, when they were in the dining-room, having a meager, womanish supper together, Sylvia said suddenly, "Will—will Gertrude come and live with us?"

Sarah cried out at such a thought at such a time, "Oh, Sylly, how can you say such things now, when he is just dead? You know he would never have allowed us even to—to think of such a thing."

"But," Sylvia said, under her breath, "we can think what we please, now."

"Sister!" Miss Sarah protested.

They looked at each other, and the excitement in each face startled the other; for it was as Sylvia had said—they could think what they pleased! They could even say what they pleased. After a while, when things were settled, they could do what they pleased!

The recognition of freedom is a heady thing. These two ladies, who

> had wept, and wept the more,
> To think their grief would soon be o'er,

could not conceal from each other their consciousness of liberty. But such consciousness seemed a shameful thing to them both, so they hid it in lowered tones and phrases of sorrow.

Sylvia said nothing more of her ability to think what she pleased; but after a while in a subdued voice she said: "I wish we knew about the will. Sadie, don't you think he must have destroyed the old will and made one in Nick's favor?"

"If he didn't," Sarah reminded her, "we can share all we have with Gertrude."

"Yes," Sylvia said, "but the slight to Nick, the slight to poor Gertrude! But suppose he did destroy it, and didn't make a new one—you know that is possible—what then, Sadie?"

"Why," said Miss Sarah, falling back on her

scanty knowledge of the law, "I suppose it would all come to us three children; so Gertrude, or, at any rate, the boys, would get Nick's share."

"What I am hoping for is that he made a new will and forgave dear Nick."

"So am I," said Miss Sadie.

The funeral took place the next day, in a long, quiet rain. When the two daughters came back in the June twilight to the empty house—their house, now,—the senior clerk in Mr. Halsey's office was awaiting them to offer respectful sympathy, and ask, in a low voice, one or two questions as to the wishes of his late employer's daughters. He said that he had put all Mr. Halsey's papers together. "But I did not," he added, "come across the will. Doubtless it is in the desk in his library."

"You might look," Miss Sarah said. They sat down in the parlor, with their thick veils still over their faces, and, holding each other's hands, waited while he looked.

It was a quarter of an hour before he came back to say, in a perplexed way, that he could not find the will in Mr. Halsey's desk. The sisters squeezed each other's hands.

"I think he made a will," Sylvia said.

"I cannot speak authoritatively," Mr. Robin said, "but I am confident he did."

"Suppose," said Sylvia, "he didn't?"

"Then the estate would go to your father's heirs, my dear young lady; his three children.

But, if I may say so, Mr. Halsey was much too careful a man to die intestate."

"But if he *did?*" Miss Sylvia insisted, "then my brother Nick would have a third?"

"Yes," Mr. Robin said; "or, rather, your brother's heirs would."

When they were alone, Sylvia's eyes were passionate with relief.

"Sadie! He didn't make that dreadful will! He just said what he did to—to scare us. So Gertrude will have Nick's share."

"Thank God!" said the older sister.

In the parlor that rainy evening after the funeral, there was a curiously solemn moment. Miss Sarah had said something about dear father, and wept; then they fell silent; the windows were open, and the smell of new box and wet roses came in from the dark garden; they could hear the rain falling on the leaves of the great catalpas on either side of the porch. Suddenly, in the silence, came the pad of soft feet on the steps; Rover and Watch whined a little, then scratched at the front door. Instantly one of the sisters called out, sharply: "No, Watch!—No Rover! You can't come into the house!"

And the other said, breathlessly, "No! They can't."

It was their declaration of independence. Immediately, in their natural voices they fell to talking of all the things they meant to do; and most of all, how they were going, as soon as they

could settle things in the house, to Philadelphia, to see Gertrude—poor Gertrude!—and the little boys.

In the next few days the situation took definite shape: Lewis Halsey's will could not be found. The office, the bank, his library, an old desk in his bedroom, all had been searched, and no will appeared.

"It isn't like him not to have made a will," Mr. Robin said, over and over. "I can't understand it!"

"It doesn't really make any difference, does it?" Miss Sylvia asked.

"Probably not, so far as his family is concerned," Mr. Robin said.

It was the strangeness of such negligence, rather than any practical inconvenience resulting from it, that made people wonder and talk. William King commented on it to Dr. Lavendar, who looked very much surprised.

"Halsey not leave a will?" he said; "why, he must have! In fact, I happen to—" He paused.

"—to what, sir?" William asked.

"To think he did," said Dr. Lavendar, mildly. Dr. Lavendar was very mild sometimes. "And *that's* when he'll bite you, if you don't look out," poor, snubbed William said to himself.

As for Dr. Lavendar, when he went to see the two bereaved ladies he said, gravely, that he had heard that no will had as yet been found, and he was encouraged to hope that their father had

destroyed the will he made after poor Nick's marriage.

"Oh," said Miss Sarah, blankly, "you think he made one, Dr. Lavendar?"

"Yes; he made one," said the old minister; "but it seems probable that he thought better of it and destroyed it. I am very thankful, for at that time he was angry; and an angry will is always an unjust one."

He sat there in Lewis Halsey's library, between the two sisters, and let them tell him what they meant to do.

"We've written to Gertrude that she is to live with us, and we told her that the boys will have all poor darling Nick's money, so she need never worry any more."

"Isn't that a little premature?" Dr. Lavendar said, gently; "of course, it is possible that somewhere—"

But the two sisters cried out, impetuously, no! it wasn't possible! They had looked everywhere.

"When I was a boy," said Dr. Lavendar, "and I lost my top, or a fish-hook, my mother used to say, 'Look in all the possible places, and then look in all the impossible places.'"

The sisters laughed. They were beginning to laugh a little now, for, in spite of their grief about Nick, there was this happiness of being able to help Nick's Gertrude. As for looking—"Oh yes; we've looked in every place, possible and impossible," said Sylvia, contentedly; "there isn't any will."

It was with no idea of searching further for what they did not want to find that the next day Sylvia reminded her sister of something which must be done. "We ought to look over his clothes, before we go to Philadelphia for Gertrude."

Miss Sarah, shrinking from the task of all the generations, faltered that she supposed they ought to do it.

They began the sorting out and laying aside that afternoon; the house was very still, and in his room their voices were stilled, too. They did their work with painstaking respect for his possessions: this pile of things for the gardener; that for George; a trunkful to go to Dr. Lavendar to be given to any poor man who might need them —"any worthy poor man," Miss Sarah amended.

"Yes," Sylvia said, lifting out the pile of handkerchiefs in the top drawer of the bureau. . . . *There it was!*

Openly, obviously, thrown in among some collars, hidden under a careless clutter of handkerchiefs. A long, folded, blue paper. It was unmistakable. It hardly needed the "Last Will and Testament" indorsed on the top. That it should have been in such a place was one of those incomprehensibly careless things which are done by careful men.

Sylvia Halsey, emptying the drawer, cried out in a sharp voice:

"Sarah! Here it is—oh, Sarah!" She held on to the edge of the drawer, looking down at that

folded document; she was trembling all over. "What shall we do? *Here it is!*"

Miss Sarah was speechless.

"We must look at it," Sylvia said, passionately. "I *will* know!"

Deliberately, but with shaking hands, she broke the seals and began to read. Sarah, holding her breath, watched her. Sylvia's face changed from anxiety to violent anger.

"Wicked!" she called out, loudly; "wicked! He calls Gertrude—he calls Nick's wife—that name! Oh, I won't have it! I won't bear it!" She threw the will on the floor and set her heel on it. "Wicked! Wicked! Read it; read his wicked will," she said.

Sarah picked the paper up and began to read it. In the middle of it, in her despair and shame, she sat down on the floor, leaning her head against the bed, and groaned. In incisive words, brutal, cruel, insulting to his son and to the good and simple woman his son had married, Lewis Halsey had made that will which he believed "no lawyer this side of hell" could break. The two ladies, tingling from head to foot with horror and pain, did not realize the legal quality of the instrument before them, but they knew what it meant in relation to their brother's wife.

"Of course," said Sylvia, "we could give her a third of the income,—we can't touch the principal, you see; but simply sharing the income wouldn't make up to Gertrude and the little boys,

and our Nick, our dear, dear Nick! for the awful things father says. Oh," she said, suddenly, raising her clenched hands and looking up, "I hate you, father!"

She spoke through her shut teeth, and she looked exactly like Lewis Halsey. Sarah, crouching on the floor, cringed away from her.

"Oh, Sylvia, do stop!" she whispered.

Sylvia put out her hand and lifted her sister to her feet. "Now listen," she said, curtly. She picked up the will, and read a paragraph here and another there. Even to their ignorant ears, it was conclusive. He left the entire income of his estate to his daughters, but he forbade them, "on pain of his displeasure," to use any part of this income for their brother, or his heirs or assigns. Then followed a long paragraph, in involved and technical terms, as to the final disposal of the property.

"I can't understand all that," Sylvia said, skimming it with angry eyes; "it seems to be only another insult to Nick—a way of keeping the money from Gertrude and the little boys when we are dead. I won't read it!"

"He can't stop us from using the income as we like," Miss Sarah said.

"No; though he tries to!—'on pain of his displeasure'! What do we care for his 'displeasure'! But, Sarah, don't you understand? Before we can get at the income, to give it to Gertrude, the will must go to probate; and then everybody

will know what he said—know this dreadful lie about Nick's wife; about the little boys' mother —our sister!"

Miss Sarah was dumb.

"There is only one thing to do," Sylvia said, loudly.

Sarah Halsey nodded.

"We had better go down to the library," Sylvia said, in a low voice; "there's a fireplace there."

The two hurrying, furtive figures went swiftly down-stairs. In the library Sylvia said: "We'd better close the shutters. Somebody might look in."

"No," Sarah whispered; "because if any one saw the shutters shut—they might think—"

"So they might," Sylvia agreed; they closed the library door; there was a great jug of damask roses in the empty grate, and this they lifted, careful not to scatter the dark-red petals on the floor.

"You'd better stand at the window, Sarah, and don't let any one come near enough to the house to—see."

"Oh, Sylly," the older sister said, gratefully, "you are so brave! I *couldn't* do it!"

She went over to one of the long French windows that opened on to the porch, and stood there. Oh, how slow Sylvia was! Why didn't she—*do it?* She was just about to turn when she heard the sharp sound of tearing paper. Sheet after sheet torn across and dropped into the grate. Then

came the striking of a match and the spurt of flame. A minute later there was the tiny crackle of fire and the smell of burning paper. Sarah leaned against the casement of the window; she could hear the muffled sound of her own heart above the faint sounds of the flames.

"It is done," Sylvia said at last, solemnly. The older woman was speechless. She came, trembling, across the room, and looked down at a little charred heap in the grate. Sylvia was perfectly composed.

"We have done right, Sarah," she said; "you must never think but what we have done right."

"It is a crime, you know," Miss Sarah said, with dry lips.

"It isn't a crime to stop a crime!"

They had forgotten the open window now, and clung to each other, one crying, the other comforting; then, suddenly, they sprang apart. There was a step on the path. Dr. Lavendar, under a big, green umbrella, with a palm-leaf fan in his hand, was coming up the path between the flower-beds.

When he reached the porch he lowered his umbrella and, taking off his hat, wiped his forehead and glanced through the open window. "Shall I come in?" he called; and without waiting for their reply he stepped over the low sill. "Busy?" he said. "I thought I would come and see how you were getting along."

"You are so kind, Dr. Lavendar," Sarah Halsey said, breathlessly.

"Well!" he said, chuckling, as his eye fell on the smoldering heap in the grate, "I should think eighty in the shade was warm enough for you without—" He stopped short, his face changing abruptly. He gave a quick look, first at one sister and then at the other. Neither spoke. A curling black cinder of paper fell from between the bars of the grate.

"Do sit down, sir," Sarah said, faintly.

But Dr. Lavendar walked over to the fireplace. The air tingled with silence. Then Miss Sarah said, with a sort of gasp: "It is so hot; won't you have a glass of water?"

"No," he said, gravely. Then he stooped and picked from the hearth a tiny scrap of blue paper. "You have been burning—*rubbish?*" he said. There was no answer. With the little piece of paper in his hand, Dr. Lavendar turned back and sat down on the sofa. There were a few vague words—about the heat, about the big strawberry that Willy King had found on his vines that morning and brought over on a fresh plantain-leaf for Dr. Lavendar's breakfast, about anything but the "rubbish."

Gradually Sarah Halsey stopped trembling. Sylvia, who had not spoken since he entered, was standing in front of the grate, her spreading skirts hiding everything behind her; as the friendly, simple talk went on, she relaxed a little, and the color came slowly back into her strained, white face. It seemed hours to the two sisters,

but it was only a very little while that the old man sat there, talking gently of ordinary things, but with his eyes plumbing theirs.

When at last he rose, saying, quietly, "Let me know if I can help you, girls," the sisters watched him go out into the sunshine, and then turned and sobbed in each other's arms.

"After this," Sylvia said—"after this, I'll be —I'll be—good."

"You've always been good!" the older woman comforted her. "Dr. Lavendar himself would not say anything else."

"Oh yes, he would," Sylvia said, her breath catching in her throat; "yes, he would! He would say that *this* happened because I have been a coward; oh, Sarah! a coward and—a liar. But he would have pity—he would know—he would remember—"

Dr. Lavendar, under the big, green umbrella, plodded along the dusty road in the frowning preoccupation of that "pity" of which Sylvia Halsey was so sure. "Poor children!" he was saying to himself. "Poor girls! But it's Halsey's sin. He sowed fear. What other harvest could be reaped? But it must be the last harvest. The girls are mine, now."

In the dark coolness of his study he sipped a glass of water and looked at that scrap of blue paper. There was nothing written on it; not a single betraying word; it might be any kind of

"rubbish"—no one could possibly be sure what kind.

"Ignorance is a great thing," Dr. Lavendar meditated; "a blessed thing! I don't *know* that it was the will. And I am thankful he didn't tell me to what the money was to 'revert,' because then it might have been my duty to find out." He tore the paper up into minute scraps and sat holding them in his hand for several minutes. "That poor woman and her babies are provided for," he thought. "But suppose I had come ten minutes earlier!"

Then he got up and dropped the little handful into his waste-basket.

THE VOICE

THE VOICE

I

"DR. LAVENDAR," said William King, "some time when Goliath is doing his 2:40 on a plank road, don't you want to pull up at that house on the Perryville pike where the Grays used to live, and make a call? An old fellow called Roberts has taken it; he is a—"

"Teach your grandmother," said Dr. Lavendar; "he is an Irvingite. He comes from Lower Ripple, down on the Ohio, and he has a daughter, Philippa."

"Oh," said Dr. King, "you know 'em, do you?"

"Know them? Of course I know them! Do you think you are the only man who tries to enlarge his business? But I was not successful in my efforts. The old gentleman doesn't go to any church; and the young lady inclines to the Perryville meeting-house—the parson there is a nice boy."

"She is an attractive young creature," said the doctor, smiling at some pleasant memory; "the kind of girl a man would like to have for a daugh-

ter. But did you ever know such an old-fashioned little thing!"

"Well, she's like the girls I knew when I was the age of the Perryville parson, so I suppose you'd call her old-fashioned," Dr. Lavendar said. "There aren't many such girls nowadays; sweet-tempered and sensible and with some fun in 'em."

"Why don't you say 'good,' too?" William King inquired.

"Unnecessary," Dr. Lavendar said, scratching Danny's ear; "anybody who is amiable, sensible, and humorous *is* good. Can't help it."

"The father is good," William King said, "but he is certainly not sensible. He's an old donkey, with his *Tongues* and his *Voice!*"

Dr. Lavendar's face sobered. "No," he said, "he may be an Irvingite, but he isn't a donkey."

"What on earth is an Irvingite, anyhow?" William asked.

Dr. Lavendar looked at him pityingly: "William, you are so ridiculously young! Well, I suppose you can't help it. My boy, about the time you were born, there was a man in London —some folks called him a saint, and other folks called him a fool; it's a way folks have had ever since some of them said that a certain Galilean peasant had a devil. His name was Irving, and he started a new sect." (Dr. Lavendar was as open-minded as it is possible for one of his Church to be, but even he said "sect" when it came to outsiders.) "He started this

new sect, which believed that the Holy Ghost would speak again by human lips, just as on the Day of Pentecost. Well, there was 'speaking' in his congregation; sort of outbursts of exhortation, you know. Mostly unintelligible. I remember Dr. Alexander said it was 'gibberish'; he heard some of it when he was in London. It may have been 'gibberish,' but nobody can doubt Irving's sincerity in thinking it was the Voice of God. When he couldn't understand it, he just called it an 'unknown tongue.' Of course he was considered a heretic. He was put out of his Church. He died soon after, poor fellow."

"Doesn't Mr. Roberts's everlasting arguing about it tire you out?" William asked; "when he attacks me, I always remember a call I have to make."

"Oh, no," Dr. Lavendar said, cheerfully; "after he has talked about half an hour, I just shut my eyes; he never notices it! He's a gentle old soul. When I answer back—once in a while I really have to speak up for the Protestant Episcopal Church—I feel as if I had kicked Danny."

William King grinned. Then he got up and, drawing his coat-tails forward, stood with his back to the jug of lilacs in Dr. Lavendar's fireplace, and yawned; "oh, well, of course it's all bosh," he said; "I was on a case till four o'clock this morning," he apologized.

"William," said Dr. Lavendar, admiringly, "what an advantage you fellows have over us

poor parsons! Everything a medical man doesn't understand is 'bosh.' Now, we can't classify things as easily as that."

"Well, I don't care," William said, doggedly; "from my point of view—"

"From your point of view," said Dr. Lavendar, "St. Paul was an epileptic, because he heard a Voice?"

"If you really want to know what I think—"

"I don't," Dr. Lavendar said; "I want you to know what *I* think. Mr. Roberts hasn't heard any Voice, yet; he is only listening for it. William, listening for the Voice of God isn't necessarily a sign of poor health; and provided a man doesn't set himself up to think he is the only person his Heavenly Father is willing to speak to, listening won't do him any harm. As for Henry Roberts, he is a humble old man. An example to me, William! I am pretty arrogant once in a while. I have to be, with such men as you in my congregation. No; the real trouble in that household is that girl of his. It isn't right for a young thing to live in such an atmosphere."

William agreed sleepily. "Pretty creature. Wish I had a daughter just like her," he said, and took himself off to make up for a broken night's rest. But Dr. Lavendar and Danny still sat in front of the lilac-filled fireplace, and thought of old Henry Roberts listening for the Voice of God, and of his Philippa.

The father and daughter had lately taken a

DR. LAVENDAR'S BUGGY PULLED UP AT THEIR GATE

house on a road that wandered over the hills from Old Chester to Perryville. They were about half-way between the two little towns, and they did not seem to belong to either. Perryville's small manufacturing bustle repelled the silent old man whom Dr. Lavendar called an "Irvingite"; and Old Chester's dignity and dull aloofness repelled young Philippa. The result was that the Robertses and their one woman-servant, Hannah, had been living on the Perryville pike for some months before anybody in either village was quite aware of their existence. Then one day in May Dr. Lavendar's buggy pulled up at their gate, and the old minister called over the garden wall to Philippa: "Won't you give me some of your apple blossoms?"

That was the beginning of Old Chester's knowledge of the Roberts family. A little later Perryville came to know them, too: the Rev. John Fenn, pastor of the Perryville Presbyterian Church, got off his big, raw-boned Kentucky horse at the same little white gate in the brick wall at which Goliath had stopped, and walked solemnly—not noticing the apple blossoms—up to the porch. Henry Roberts was sitting there in the warm twilight, with a curious listening look in his face—a look of waiting expectation; it was so marked that the caller involuntarily glanced over his shoulder to see if any other visitor was approaching; but there was nothing to be seen in the dusk but the roan nibbling at the hitching-

post. Mr. Fenn said that he had called to inquire whether Mr. Roberts was a regular attendant at any place of worship. To which the old man replied gently that every place was a place of worship, and his own house was the House of God.

John Fenn was honestly dismayed at such sentiments—dismayed, and a little indignant; and yet, somehow, the self-confidence of the old man daunted him. It made him feel very young, and there is nothing so daunting to Youth as to feel young. Therefore he said, venerably, that he hoped Mr. Roberts realized that it was possible to deceive oneself in such matters. "It is a dangerous thing to neglect the means of grace," he said.

"Surely it is," said Henry Roberts, meekly; after which there was nothing for the caller to do but offer the Irvingite a copy of the *American Messenger* and take his departure. He was so genuinely concerned about Mr. Roberts's "danger," that he did not notice Philippa sitting on a stool at her father's side. But Philippa noticed him.

So, after their kind, did these two shepherds of souls endeavor to establish a relationship with Henry and Philippa Roberts. And they were equally successful. Philippa gave her apple blossoms to the old minister—and went to Mr. Fenn's church the very next Sunday. Henry Roberts accepted the tracts with a simple belief in the kindly purpose of the young minister, and stayed

away from both churches. But both father and daughter were pleased by the clerical attentions:

"I love Dr. Lavendar," Philippa said to her father.

"I am obliged to Mr. Fenn," her father said to Philippa. "The youth," he added, "cares for my soul. I am obliged to any one who cares for my soul."

He was, indeed, as Dr. Lavendar said, a man of humble mind; and yet with his humbleness was a serene certainty of belief as to his soul's welfare that would have been impossible to John Fenn, who measured every man's chance of salvation by his own theological yardstick—or even to Dr. Lavendar, who thought salvation unmeasurable. But then neither of these two ministers had had Henry Roberts's experience. It was very far back, that experience; it happened before Philippa was born; and when they came to live between the two villages Philippa was twenty-four years old. . . .

It was in the thirties that young Roberts, a tanner in Lower Ripple, went to England to collect a small bequest left him by a relative. The sense of distance, the long weeks at sea in a sailing-vessel, the new country and the new people, all impressed themselves upon a very sensitive mind, a mind which, even without such emotional preparation, was ready to respond to any deeply emotional appeal. Then came the appeal. It was that new gospel of the Tongues, which, in

those days, astounded and thrilled all London from the lips of Edward Irving—fanatic, saint, and martyr!—the man who, having prayed that God would speak again in prophecy, would not deny the power of prayer by refusing to believe that his prayer was answered, even though the prophecy was unintelligible. And later, when the passionate cadences of the spirit were in English, and were found to be only trite or foolish words, repeated and repeated in a wailing chant by some sincere, hysterical woman, he still believed that a new day of Pentecost had dawned upon a sinful world! "For," said he, "when I asked for bread, would God give me a stone?"

Henry Roberts went to hear the great preacher and forgot his haste to receive his little legacy so that he might hurry back to the tanyard. Irving's eloquence entranced him, and it alone would have held him longer than the time he had allowed himself for absence from the tannery. But it happened that he was present on that Lord's Day when, with a solemn and dreadful sound, the Tongues first spoke in that dingy Chapel in Regent Square—and no man who heard that Sound ever forgot it! The mystical youth from America was shaken to his very soul. He stayed on in London for nearly a year, immersing himself in those tides of emotion which swept saner minds than his from the somewhat dry land of ordinary human experience. That no personal revelation was made to him, that the searing

benediction of the Tongues had not touched his own awed, uplifted brow, made no difference: he believed!—and prayed God to help any lingering unbelief that might be holding him back from deeper knowledges. To the end of his days he was Edward Irving's follower; and when he went back to America it was as a missionary of the new sect, that called itself by the resounding title of The Catholic Apostolic Church.

In Lower Ripple he preached to any who would listen to him, the doctrine of the new Pentecost. At first curiosity brought him hearers; his story of the Voice, dramatic and mysterious, was listened to in doubting silence; then disapproved of—so hotly disapproved of that he was sessioned and read out of Church. But in those days in western Pennsylvania, mere living was too engrossing a matter for much thought of "tongues" and "voices"; it was easier, when a man talked of dreams and visions, not to argue with him, but to say that he was "crazy." So by and by Henry Roberts's heresy was forgotten and his religion merely smiled at. Certainly it struck no roots outside his own heart. Even his family did not share his belief. When he married, as he did when he was nearly fifty, his wife was impatient with his Faith—indeed, fearful of it, and with persistent, nagging reasonableness urged his return to the respectable paths of Presbyterianism. To his pain, when his girl, his Philippa, grew up she shrank from the emotion of his creed; she

and her mother went to the brick church under the locust-trees of Lower Ripple; and when her mother died Philippa went there alone, for Henry Roberts, not being permitted to bear witness in the Church, did so out of it, by sitting at home on the Sabbath day, in a bare upper chamber, waiting for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. It never came. The Tongues never spoke. Yet still, while the years passed, he waited—listening—listening—listening; a kindly, simple old man with mystical brown eyes, believing meekly in his own unworth to hear again that Sound from Heaven, as of a rushing, mighty wind, that had filled the London Chapel, bowing human souls before it as a great wind bows the standing corn!

It was late in the sixties that Henry Roberts brought his faith and his Philippa to the stone house on the Perryville pike, where, after some months had passed, they were discovered by the old and the young ministers. The two clergymen met once or twice in their calls upon the new-comer, and each acquired an opinion of the other: John Fenn said to himself that the old minister was a good man, if he was an Episcopalian; and Dr. Lavendar said to William King that he hoped there would be a match between the "theolog" and Philippa.

"The child ought to be married and have a dozen children," he said; "Fenn's little sister will do to begin on—she needs mothering badly enough! Yes, Miss Philly ought to be Mrs. Fenn,

and be making smearkase and apple-butter for that pale and excellent young man. He intimated that I was a follower of the Scarlet Woman because I wore a surplice."

"Now look here! I draw the line at that sort of talk," the doctor said; "he can lay down the law to me, all he wants to; but when it comes to instructing you—"

"Oh, well, he's young," Dr. Lavendar soothed him; "you can't expect him not to know everything at his age. Remember how wise you were, Willy, at twenty-five. You'll never know as much as you knew then."

"He's a squirt," said William. In those days middle-aged Old Chester was apt to sum up its opinion of youth in this expressive word.

"We were all squirts once," said Dr. Lavendar, "and very nice boys we were, too—at least I was. Yes, I hope the youngster will see what a sweet creature old Roberts's Philippa is."

She was a sweet creature; but as William King said, she was amusingly old-fashioned. The Old Chester girl of those days, who seems (to look back upon her in these days) so medieval, was modern compared to Philippa! But there was nothing mystical about her; she was just modest and full of pleasant silences and soft gaieties and simple, startling truth-telling. At first, when they came to live near Perryville, she used, on Sundays, when the weather was fine, to walk over the grassy road, under the brown and white branches of the

sycamores into Old Chester, to Dr. Lavendar's church. "I like to come to your church," she told him, "because you don't preach quite such long sermons as Mr. Fenn does." But when it rained or was very hot she chose the shorter walk and sat under John Fenn, looking up at his pale, ascetic face, lighted from within by his young certainties concerning the old ignorances of people like Dr. Lavendar—life and death and eternity. Of Dr. Lavendar's one certainty, Love, he was deeply ignorant, this honest boy, who was so concerned for Philippa's father's soul! But Philippa did not listen much to his certainties; she coaxed his little sister into her pew, and sat with the child cuddled up against her, watching her turn over the leaves of the hymn-book or trying to braid the fringe of Miss Philly's black silk mantilla into little pigtails. Sometimes Miss Philly would look up at the careworn young face in the pulpit and think how holy Mary's brother was, and how learned—and how shabby; for he had only a housekeeper, Mrs. Semple, to take care of him and Mary. Not but what he might have had somebody besides Mrs. Semple! Philippa, for all her innocence, could not help being aware that he might have had—almost anybody! For others of Philly's sex watched the rapt face there in the pulpit. When Philippa thought of that, a slow blush used to creep up to her very temples; she was ashamed, as many other women have been—and for the same cause—of her sex.

"They think they are religious," said little Philly to herself, "but they are just in love!" And the blush burned still hotter.

So it happened that she saw Mr. Fenn oftener in the pulpit than out of it, for when he came to call on her father she made a point of keeping in her own room, or in the kitchen with Hannah.

At first he came very frequently to see the Irvingite, because he felt it his duty to "deal" with him; but he made so little impression that he foresaw the time when it would be necessary to say that Ephraim was joined to his idols.

But though it might be right to "let him alone," he could not stop calling at Henry Roberts's house; "for," he reminded himself, "the believing daughter may sanctify the unbelieving father!" He said this once to Dr. Lavendar, when his roan and old Goliath met in a narrow lane and paused to let their masters exchange a word or two.

"But do you know what the believing daughter believes?" said Dr. Lavendar. He wiped his forehead with his red bandanna, for it was a hot day; then he put his old straw hat very far back on his head and looked at the young man with a twinkle in his eye, which, considering the seriousness of their conversation, was discomfiting; but, after all, as John Fenn reminded himself, Dr. Lavendar was very old, and so might be forgiven if his mind was lacking in seriousness. As for his question of what the daughter believed:

"I think—I hope," said the young minister,

"that she is sound. She comes to my church quite regularly."

"But she comes to my church quite irregularly," Dr. Lavendar warned him; and there was another of those disconcerting twinkles.

The boy looked at him with honest, solemn eyes. "I still believe that she is sound," he said, earnestly.

Dr. Lavendar blew his nose with a flourish of the red bandanna. "Well, perhaps she is, perhaps she is," he said, gravely.

But the reassurance of that "perhaps" did not make for John Fenn's peace of mind; he could not help asking himself whether Miss Philippa *was* a "believing daughter." She did not, he was sure, share her father's heresies, but perhaps she was indifferent to them?—which would be a grievous thing! And certainly, as the old minister had declared, she did go "irregularly" to the Episcopal Church. John Fenn wished that he was sure of Miss Philippa's state of mind; and at last he said to himself that it was his duty to find out about it, so, with his little sister beside him, he started on a round of pastoral calls. He found Miss Philly sitting in the sunshine on the lowest step of the front porch—and it seemed to Mary that there was a good deal of delay in getting at the serious business of play; "for brother talks so much," she complained. But "brother" went on talking. He told Miss Philippa that he understood she went sometimes to Old Chester to church?

"Sometimes," she said.

"I do not mean," he said, hesitatingly, "to speak uncharitably, but we all know that Episcopacy is the handmaid of Papistry."

"Do we?" Philly asked, with grave eyes.

"Yes," said Mr. Fenn. "But even if Dr. Lavendar's teachings are defective,"—Mary plucked at his sleeve, and sighed loudly; "(no, Mary!) —even if his teachings are defective, he is a good man according to his lights; I am sure of that. Still, do you think it well to attend a place of worship when you cannot follow the pastor's teachings?"

"I love him. And I don't listen to what he says," she excused herself.

"But you should listen to what ministers say," the shocked young man protested—"at least to ministers of the right faith. But you should not go to church because you love ministers."

Philippa's face flamed. "I do not love—most of them."

Mary, leaning against the girl's knee, looked up anxiously into her face. "Do you love brother?" she said.

They were a pretty pair, the child and the girl, sitting there on the porch with the sunshine sifting down through the lacy leaves of the two big locusts on either side of the door. Philippa wore a pink-and-green palm-leaf chintz; it had six ruffles around the skirt and was gathered very full about her slender waist; her lips were red, and

her cheeks and even her neck were delicately flushed; her red-brown hair was blowing all about her temples; Mary had put an arm around her and was cuddling against her. Yes, even Mary's brother would have thought the two young things a pretty sight had there been nothing more serious to think of. But John Fenn's thoughts were so very serious that even Mary's question caused him no embarrassment; he merely said, stiffly, that he would like to see Miss Philippa alone. "You may wait here, Mary," he told his little sister, who frowned and sighed and went out to the gate to pull a handful of grass for the roan.

Philippa led her caller to her rarely used parlor, and sat down to listen in silent pallor to his exhortations. She made no explanations for not coming to his church regularly; she offered no excuse of filial tenderness for her indifference to her father's mistaken beliefs; she looked down at her hands, clasped tightly in her lap, then out of the window at the big roan biting at the hitching-post or standing very still to let Mary rub his silky nose. But John Fenn looked only at Philippa. Of her father's heresies he would not, he said, do more than remind her that the wiles of the devil against her soul might present themselves through her natural affections; but in regard to her failure to wait upon the means of grace in his own church, he spoke without mercy, for, he said, "faithful are the wounds of a friend."

"Are you my friend?" Philly asked, lifting her gray eyes suddenly.

Mr. Fenn was greatly confused; the text-books of the Western Seminary had not supplied him with the answer to such a question. He explained, hurriedly, that he was the friend of all who wished for salvation.

"I do not especially wish for it," Philippa said, very low.

For a moment John Fenn was silent with horror. "That one so young should be so hardened!" he thought; aloud, he bade her remember hell fire. He spoke with that sad and simple acceptance of a fact, with which, even less than fifty years ago, men humbled themselves before the mystery—which they had themselves created—of divine injustice. She must know, he said, his voice trembling with sincerity, that those who slighted the offers of grace were cast into outer darkness?

Philly said, softly, "Maybe."

"'Maybe'? Alas, it is, certainly! Oh, why, *why* do you absent yourself from the house of God?" he said, holding out entreating hands. Philippa made no reply. "Let us pray!" said the young man; and they knelt down side by side in the shadowy parlor. John Fenn lifted his harsh, melancholy face, gazing upward passionately, while he wrestled for her salvation; Philly, looking downward, tracing with a trembling finger the pattern of the beadwork on the otto-

man before which she knelt, listened with an inward shiver of dismay and ecstasy. But when they rose to their feet she had nothing to say. He, too, was silent. He went away quite exhausted by his struggle with this impassive, unresisting creature.

He hardly spoke to Mary all the way home. "A hardened sinner," he was thinking. "Poor, lovely creature! So young and so lost!" Under Mary's incessant chatter, her tugs at the end of the reins, her little bursts of joy at the sight of a bird or a roadside flower, he was thinking, with a strange new pain—a pain no other sinner had ever roused in him—of the girl he had left. He knew that his arguments had not moved her. "I believe," he thought, the color rising in his face, "that she dislikes me! She says she loves Dr. Lavendar; yes, she must dislike me. Is my manner too severe? Perhaps my appearance is unattractive." He looked down at his coat uneasily.

As for Philly, left to herself, she picked up a bit of sewing, and her face, at first pale, grew slowly pink. "He only likes sinners," she thought; "and, oh, I am not a sinner!"

II

After that on Sabbath mornings Philippa sat with her father, in the silent upper chamber. At first Henry Roberts, listening—listening—for the

Voice, thought, rapturously, that at the eleventh hour he was to win a soul—the most precious soul in his world!—to his faith. But when, after a while, he questioned her, he saw that this was not so; she stayed away from other churches, but not because she cared for his church. This troubled him, for the faith he had outgrown was better than no faith.

"Do you have doubts concerning the soundness of either of the ministers—the old man or the young man?" he asked her, looking at her with mild, anxious eyes.

"Oh no, sir," Philly said, smiling.

"Do you dislike them—the young man or the old man?"

"Oh no, father. I love—one of them."

"Then why not go to his church? Either minister can give you the seeds of salvation; one not less than the other. Why not sit under either ministry?"

"I don't know," Philippa said, faintly. And indeed she did not know why she absented herself. She only knew two things: that the young man seemed to disapprove of the old man; and when she saw the young man in the pulpit, impersonal and holy, she suffered. Therefore she would not go to hear either man.

When Dr. Lavendar came to call upon her father, he used to glance at Philippa sometimes over his spectacles while Henry Roberts was arguing about prophecies; but he never asked

her why she stayed away from church; instead, he talked to her about John Fenn, and he seemed pleased when he heard that the young man was doing his duty in making pastoral calls. "And I —*I*, unworthy as I was!" Henry Roberts would say, "I heard the Voice, speaking through a sister's lips; and it said: Oh, sinner! for what, for what, what can separate, separate, from the love. . . . Oh, nothing. Oh, nothing. Oh, nothing." He would stare at Dr. Lavendar with parted lips. "*I heard it*," he would say, in a whisper.

And Dr. Lavendar, bending his head gravely, would be silent for a respectful moment, and then he would look at Philippa. "You are teaching Fenn's sister to sew?" he would say. "Very nice! Very nice!"

Philly saw a good deal of 'Fenn's sister' that summer; the young minister, recognizing Miss Philippa's fondness for Mary, and remembering a text as to the leading of a child, took pains to bring the little girl to Henry Roberts's door once or twice a week; and as August burned away into September Philippa's pleasure in her was like a soft wind blowing on the embers of her heart and kindling a flame for which she knew no name. She thought constantly of Mary, and had many small anxieties about her—her dress, her manners, her health; she even took the child into Old Chester one day to get William King to pull a little loose white tooth. Philly shook very much during the operation and mingled her tears with Mary's in

that empty and bleeding moment that follows the loss of a tooth. She was so passionately tender with the little girl that the doctor told Dr. Lavendar that his match-making scheme seemed likely to prosper—"she's so fond of the sister—you should have heard her sympathize with the little thing!—that I think she will smile on the brother," he said.

"I'm afraid the brother hasn't cut his wisdom teeth yet," Dr. Lavendar said, doubtfully; "if he had, you might pull them, and she could sympathize with him; then it would all arrange itself. Well, he's a nice boy, a nice boy;—and he won't know so much when he gets a little older."

It was on the way home from Dr. King's that Philippa's feeling of responsibility about Mary brought her a sudden temptation. They were walking hand in hand along the road. The leaves on the mottled branches of the sycamores were thinning now, and the sunshine fell warm upon the two young things, who were still a little shaken from the frightful experience of tooth-pulling. The doctor had put the small white tooth in a box and gravely presented it to Mary, and now, as they walked along, she stopped sometimes to examine it and say, proudly, how she had "bleeded and bleeded!"

"Will you tell brother the doctor said I behaved better than the circus lion when his tooth was pulled?"

"Indeed I will, Mary!"

"An' that he said he'd rather pull my tooth than a lion's tooth?"

"Of course I'll tell him."

"Miss Philly, shall I dream of my tooth, do you suppose?"

Philippa laughed and said she didn't know.

"I hope I will; it means something nice. I forget what, now."

"Dreams don't mean anything, Mary."

"Oh yes, they do!" the child assured her, skipping along with one arm round the girl's slender waist. "Mrs. Semple has a dream-book, an' she reads it to me every day, an' she reads me what my dreams mean. Sometimes I haven't any dreams," Mary admitted, regretfully, "but she reads all the same. Did you ever dream about a black ox walking on its back legs? I never did. I don't want to. It means trouble."

"Goosey!" said Miss Philippa.

"If you dream of the moon," Mary went on, happily, "it means you are going to have a beau who'll love you."

"Little girls mustn't talk about love," Philippa said, gravely; but the color came suddenly into her face. To dream of the moon means— Why! but only the night before she had dreamed that she had been walking in the fields and had seen the moon rise over shocks of corn that stood against the sky like the plumed heads of Indian warriors! "Such things are foolish, Mary," Miss Philly said, her cheeks very pink. And while

Mary chattered on about Mrs. Semple's book, Philippa was silent, remembering how yellow the great flat disk of the moon had been in her dream; how it pushed up from behind the black edge of the world, and how, suddenly, the misty stubble-field was flooded with its strange light:—"you are going to have a beau!"

Philippa wished she might see the dream-book, just to know what sort of things were read to Mary. "It isn't right to read them to the child," she thought; "it's a foolish book, Mary," she said, aloud. "I never saw such a book."

"I'll bring it the next time I come," Mary promised.

"Oh no, no," Philly said, a little breathlessly; "it's a wrong book. I couldn't read such a book, except—except to tell you how foolish and wrong it is."

Mary was not concerned with her friend's reasons; but she remembered to bring the ragged old book with her the very next time her brother dropped her at Mr. Roberts's gate to spend an hour with Miss Philippa. There had to be a few formal words between the preacher and the sinner before Mary had entire possession of her playmate, but when her brother drove away, promising to call for her later in the afternoon, she became so engrossed in the important task of picking hollyhock seeds that she quite forgot the dream-book. The air was hazy with autumn, and full of the scent of fallen leaves and dew-

drenched grass and of the fresh tan-bark on the garden paths. On the other side of the road was a corn-field, where the corn stood in great shocks. Philly looked over at it, and drew a quick breath —her dream!

"Did you bring that foolish book?" she said.

Mary, slapping her pocket, laughed loudly. "I 'most forgot! Yes, ma'am; I got it. I'll show what it says about the black ox—"

"No; you needn't," Miss Philly said; "you pick some more seeds for me, and I'll—just look at it." She touched the stained old book with shrinking finger-tips; the moldering leather cover and the odor of soiled and thumb-marked leaves offended her. The first page was folded over, and when she spread it out, the yellowing paper cracked along its ancient creases; it was a map, with the signs of the Zodiac; in the middle was a single verse:

> Mortal! Wouldst thou scan aright
> Dreams and visions of the night?
> Wouldst thou future secrets learn
> And the fate of dreams discern?
> Wouldst thou ope the Curtain dark
> And thy future fortune mark?
> Try the mystic page, and read
> What the vision has decreed.

Philly, holding her red lip between her teeth, turned the pages:

"*Money. To dream of finding money; mourning and loss.*

"*Monkey. You have secret enemies.*

"*Moon.*" (Philippa shivered.) "*A good omen; it denotes coming joy. Great success in love.*"

She shut the book sharply, then opened it again. Such books sometimes told (so foolishly!) of charms which would bring love. She looked furtively at Mary; but the child, pulling down a great hollyhock to pick the fuzzy yellow disks, was not noticing Miss Philly's interest in the "foolish book." Philippa turned over the pages. Yes; the charms were there! . . .

Instructions for making dumb-cake, to cut which reveals a lover: "*Any number of young females shall take a handful of wheaten flour—*" That was no use; there were too many 'young females' as it was!

"*To know whether a man shall have the woman he wishes.*" Philippa sighed. Not that. A holy man does not "wish" for a woman.

"*A charm to charm a man's love.*" The blood suddenly rang tingling in Philly's veins. "*Let a young maid pick of rosemary two roots; of monk's-hood—*" A line had been drawn through this last word, and another word written above it; but the ink was so faded, the page so woolly and thin with use, that it was impossible to decipher the correction; perhaps it was "motherwort," an herb Philly did not know; or it might be "mandrake"? It looked as much like one as the other, the writing was so blurred and dim. "It is best to take what the book says," Philly

said, simply; "besides, I haven't those other things in the garden, and I have monk's-hood and rosemary—if I should want to do it, just for fun."

"*Of monk's-hood two roots, and of the flower of corn ten threads; let her sleep on them one night. In the morning let her set them on her heart and walk backwards ten steps, praying for the love of her beloved. Let her then steep and boil these things in four gills of pure water on which the moon has shone for one night. When she shall add this philter to the drink of the one who loves her not, he shall love the female who meets his eye first after the drinking thereof. Therefore let the young maid be industrious to stand before him when he shall drink it.*"

"There is no harm in it," said Philly.

III

"Somebody making herb tea and stealing my business?" said William King, in his kindly voice; he had called to see old Hannah, who had been laid up for a day or two, and he stopped at the kitchen door to look in. Henry Roberts, coming from the sitting-room to join him, asked his question, too:

"What is this smell of herbs, Philippa? Are you making a drink for Hannah?"

"Oh no, father," Philly said, briefly, her face very pink.

William King sniffed and laughed. "Ah, I see you don't give away your secrets to a rival," he

said; and added, pleasantly, "but don't give your tea to Hannah without telling me what it is."

Miss Philippa said, dutifully, "Oh no, sir." But she did not tell him what the "tea" was, and certainly she offered none of it to old Hannah. All that day there was a shy joyousness about her, with sudden soft blushes, and once or twice a little half-frightened laugh; there was a puzzled look, too, in her face, as if she was not quite sure just what she was going to do, or rather, how she was going to do it. And, of course, that was the difficulty. How could she "add the philter to the drink of one who loved her not"?

Yet it came about simply enough. John Fenn had lately felt it borne in upon him that it was time to make another effort to deal with Henry Roberts; perhaps, he reasoned, to show concern about the father's soul might touch the daughter's hardened heart. It was when he reached this conclusion that he committed the extravagance of buying a new coat. So it happened that that very afternoon, while the house was still pungent with the scent of steeping herbs, he came to Henry Roberts's door, and knocked solemnly, as befitted his errand; (but as he heard her step in the hall he passed an anxious hand over a lapel of the new coat). Her father, she said, was not at home; would Mr. Fenn come in and wait for him? Mr. Fenn said he would. And as he always tried, poor boy! to be instant in season and out of season, he took the opportunity, while he waited

for her father and she brought him a glass of wine and a piece of cake, to reprove her again for absence from church. But she was so meek that he found it hard to inflict those "faithful wounds" which should prove his friendship for her soul; she sat before him on the slippery horsehair sofa in the parlor, her hands locked tightly together in her lap, her eyes downcast, her voice very low and trembling. She admitted her backslidings: she acknowledged her errors; but as for coming to church—she shook her head:

"Please, I won't come to church yet."

"You mean you will come, sometime?"

"Yes; sometime."

"Behold, *now* is the accepted time!"

"I will come . . . afterwards."

"After what?" he insisted.

"After—" she said, and paused. Then suddenly lifted bold, guileless eyes: "After you stop caring for my soul."

John Fenn caught his breath. Something, he did not know what, seemed to jar him rudely from that pure desire for her salvation; he said, stumblingly, that he would *always* care for her soul!—"for—for any one's soul." And was she quite well? His voice broke with tenderness. She must be careful to avoid the chill of these autumnal afternoons; "you are pale," he said, passionately—"don't—oh, don't be so pale!" It occurred to him that if she waited for him "not to care" for her salvation, she might die in her

sins; die before coming to the gate of heaven, which he was so anxious to open to her!

Philippa did not see his agitation; she was not looking at him. She only said, softly, "Perhaps you will stay to tea?"

He answered quickly that he would be pleased to do so. In the simplicity of his saintly egotism it occurred to him that the religious pleasure of entertaining him might be a means of grace to her. When she left him in the dusk of the chilly room to go and see to the supper, he fell into silent prayer for the soul that did not desire his care.

Henry Roberts, summoned by his daughter to entertain the guest until supper was ready, found him sitting in the darkness of the parlor; the old man was full of hospitable apologies for his Philippa's forgetfulness; "she did not remember the lamp!" he lamented; and making his way through the twilight of the room, he took off the prism-hung shade of the tall astral lamp on the center-table, and fumbled for a match to light the charred and sticky wick; there were very few occasions in this plain household when it was worth while to light the best lamp! This was one of them, for in those days the office dignified the man to a degree that is hardly understood now. But Henry Roberts's concern was not entirely a matter of social propriety; it was a desire to propitiate this young man who was living in certain errors of belief, so that he would be in a friendly attitude of mind and open to the arguments which were

always burning on the lips of Edward Irving's follower. He did not mean to begin them until they were at supper; so he and John Fenn sat in silence waiting Philippa's summons to the dining-room. Neither of them had any small talk; Mr. Roberts was making sure that he could trust his memory to repeat those wailing cadences of the Voice, and John Fenn, still shaken by something he could not understand that had been hidden in what he understood too well—a sinner's indifference to grace—was trying to get back to his serene, impersonal arrogance.

As for Philippa, she was frightened at her temerity in having invited the minister to a Hannahless supper; her flutter of questions as to "what" and "how" brought the old woman from her bed, in spite of the girl's half-hearted protests that she "mustn't think of getting up! Just tell me what to do," she implored, "I can manage. We are going to have—*tea!*"

"We always have tea," Hannah said, sourly; yet she was not really sour, for, like William King and Dr. Lavendar, Hannah had discerned possibilities in the Rev. John Fenn's pastoral visits. "Get your Sunday-go-to-meeting dress on," she commanded, hunching a shawl over a rheumatic shoulder and motioning the girl out of the kitchen.

Philippa, remorseful and breathless, ran quickly up to her room to put on her best frock, smooth her shining hair down in two loops over her ears, and pin her one adornment, a flat gold brooch,

on the bosom of her dress. She lifted her candle and looked at herself in the black depths of the little swinging glass on her high bureau, and her face fell into sudden wistful lines. "Oh, I do not look wicked," she thought, despairingly.

John Fenn, glancing at her across the supper-table, had some such thought himself; how strange that one so perverted in belief, should not betray perversion in her countenance! "On the contrary, her face is pleasing," he said, simply. He feared, noticing the brooch, that she was vain, as well as indifferent to her privileges; he wondered if she had observed his new coat.

Philippa's vanity did not, at any rate, give her much courage; she scarcely spoke, except to ask him whether he took cream and sugar in his tea. When she handed his cup to him, she said, very low, "Will you taste it, and see if it is right?"

He was so conscious of the tremor of her voice and hand that he made haste to reassure her, sipping his tea with much politeness of manner; as he did so, she said, suddenly, and with compelling loudness, "Is it—agreeable?"

John Fenn, startled, looked at her over the rim of his cup. "Very; very indeed," he said, quickly. But he instantly drank some water. "It is, perhaps, a little strong," he said, blinking. Then, having qualified his politeness for conscience' sake, he drank all the bitter tea for human kindness' sake—for evidently Miss Philippa had taken pains to give him what he might like. After that

she did not speak, but her face grew very rosy while she sat in silence listening to her father and their guest. Henry Roberts forgot to eat, in the passion of his theological arguments, but as supper proceeded he found his antagonist less alert than usual; the minister defended his own doctrines instead of attacking those of his host; he even admitted, a little listlessly, that if the Power fell upon him, if he himself spoke in a strange tongue, then perhaps he would believe—"that is, if I could be sure I was not out of my mind at the time," he qualified, dully. Philippa took no part in the discussion; it would not have been thought becoming in her to do so; but indeed, she hardly heard what the two men were saying. She helped old Hannah carry away the dishes, and then sat down by the table and drew the lamp near her so that she could sew; she sat there smiling a little, dimpling even, and looking down at her seam; she did not notice that John Fenn was being worsted, or that once he failed altogether to reply, and sat in unprotesting silence under Henry Roberts's rapt remembrances. A curious blackness had settled under his eyes, and twice he passed his hand across his lips.

"They are numb," he said in surprised apology to his host. A moment later he shivered violently, beads of sweat burst out on his forehead, and the color swept from his face. He started up, staring wildly about him; he tried to speak, but his words stumbled into incoherent babbling.

It was all so sudden, his rising, then falling back into his chair, then slipping sidewise and crumpling up upon the floor, all the while stammering unmeaning words—that Henry Roberts sat looking at him in dumb amazement. It was Philippa who cried out and ran forward to help him, then stopped midway, her hands clutched together at her throat, her eyes dilating with a horror that seemed to paralyze her so that she was unable to move to his assistance. The shocked silence of the moment was broken by Fenn's voice, trailing on and on, in totally unintelligible words.

Henry Roberts, staring open-mouthed, suddenly spoke: "The *Voice!*" he said.

But Philippa, as though she were breaking some invisible bond that held her, groaning even with the effort of it, said, in a whisper: "No. Not that. He is dying. Don't you see? That's what it is. He is dying."

Her father, shocked from his ecstasy, ran to John Fenn's side, trying to lift him and calling upon him to say what was the matter.

"He is going to die," said Philippa, monotonously.

Henry Roberts, aghast, calling loudly to old Hannah, ran to the kitchen and brought back a great bowl of hot water. "Drink it!" he said. "Drink it, I tell ye! I believe you're poisoned!"

And while he and Hannah bent over the unconscious young man, Philippa seemed to come out of her trance; slowly, with upraised hands,

and head bent upon her breast, she stepped backward, backward, out of the room, out of the house. On the door-step, in the darkness, she paused and listened for several minutes to certain dreadful sounds in the house. Then, suddenly, a passion of purpose swept the daze of horror away.

"*He shall not die*," she said.

She flung her skirt across her arm that her feet might not be hampered, and fled down the road toward Old Chester. It was very dark. At first her eyes, still blurred with the lamplight, could not distinguish the foot-path, and she stumbled over the grassy border into the wheel-ruts; then, feeling the loose dust under her feet, she ran and ran and ran. The blood began to sing in her ears; once her throat seemed to close so that she could not breathe, and for a moment she had to walk,—but her hands, holding up her skirts, trembled with terror at the delay. The road was very dark under the sycamore-trees; twice she tripped and fell into the brambles at one side or against a gravelly bank on the other. But stumbling somehow to her feet, again she ran and ran and ran. The night was very still; she could hear her breath tearing her throat; once she felt something hot and salty in her mouth; it was then she had to stop and walk for a little space—she must walk or fall down! And she could not fall down, no! no! no! he would die if she fell down! Once a figure loomed up in the haze, and she caught the glimmer of an inquisitive

eye. "Say," a man's voice said, "where are you bound for?" There was something in the tone that gave her a stab of fright; for a minute or two her feet seemed to fly, and she heard a laugh behind her in the darkness: "What's your hurry?" the voice called after her. And still she ran. But she was saying to herself that she must *stop;* she must stand still—just for a moment. "Oh, just for a minute?" her body whimperingly entreated; she would not listen to it! She must not listen, even though her heart burst with the strain. But her body had its way, and she fell into a walk, although she was not aware of it. In a gasping whisper she was saying, over and over: "Doctor, hurry; he'll die; hurry; I killed him." She tried to be silent, but her lips moved mechanically. "Doctor, hurry; he'll— Oh, I *mustn't* talk!" she told herself, "it takes my breath"—but still her lips moved. She began to run, heavily. "I can't talk—if—I—run—" It was then that she saw a glimmer of light and knew that she was almost in Old Chester. Very likely she would have fallen if she had not seen that far-off window just when she did.

At William King's house she dropped against the door, her fingers still clinging to the bell. She was past speaking when the doctor lifted her and carried her into the office. "No; don't try to tell me what it is," he said; "I'll put Jinny into the buggy, and we'll get back in a jiffy. I understand; Hannah is worse."

"Not . . . Hannah—"

"Your father?" he said, picking up his medicine-case.

"Not father; Mr.—Fenn—"

As the doctor hurried out to the stable to hitch up he bade his wife put certain remedies into his bag,—"and look after that child," he called over his shoulder to his efficient Martha. She was so efficient that when he had brought Jinny and the buggy to the door, Philly was able to gasp out that Mr. Fenn was sick. "Dying."

"Don't try to talk," he said again, as he helped her into the buggy. But after a while she was able to tell him, hoarsely:

"I wanted him to love me." William King was silent. "I used a charm. It was wicked."

"Come, come; not wicked," said the doctor; "a little foolish, perhaps. A new frock, and a rose in your hair, and a smile at another man, would be enough of a charm, my dear."

Philippa shook her head. "It was not enough. I wore my best frock, and I went to Dr. Lavendar's church—"

"Good gracious!" said William King.

"They were not enough. So I used a charm. I made a drink—"

"Ah!" said the doctor, frowning. "What was in the drink, Miss Philly?"

"Perhaps it was not the right herb," she said; "it may have been 'motherwort'; but the book said 'monk's-hood,' and I—"

William King reached for his whip and cut Jinny across the flanks. "*Aconite!*" he said under his breath, while Jinny leaped forward in shocked astonishment.

"Will he live?" said Philippa.

Dr. King, flecking Jinny again, and letting his reins hang over the dash-board, could not help putting a comforting arm around her. "I hope so," he said; "I hope so!" After all, there was no use telling the child that probably by this time her lover was either dead or getting better. "It's his own fault," William King thought, angrily. "Why in thunder didn't he fall in love like a man, instead of making the child resort to— G'on, Jinny! G'on!"

He still had the whip in his hand when they drew up at the gate.

IV

When Philippa Roberts had fled out into the night for help, her father and old Hannah were too alarmed to notice her absence. They went hurrying back and forth with this remedy and that. Again and again they were ready to give up; once Henry Roberts said, "He is gone!" and once Hannah began to cry, and said, "Poor lad, poor boy!" Yet each made one more effort, their jostling shadows looming gigantic against the walls or stretching across the ceiling, bending and sinking as they knelt beside the poor young man, who by that time was far beyond speech. So

the struggle went on, and little by little life began to gain. John Fenn's eyes opened. Then he smiled. Then he said something—they could not hear what.

"Bless the Lord!" said Henry Roberts.

"He's asking for Philly," said old Hannah.

By the time the doctor and Philippa reached the house the shadow of death had lifted.

"It must have been poison," Mr. Roberts told the doctor. "When he gets over it he will tell us what it was."

"I don't believe he will," said William King; he was holding Fenn's wrist between his firm fingers, and then he turned up a fluttering eyelid and looked at the still dulled eye.

Philippa, kneeling on the other side of John Fenn, said loudly: "*I* will tell *him*—and perhaps God will forgive me."

The doctor, glancing up at her, said: "No, you won't—anyhow at present. Take that child up-stairs, Hannah," he commanded, "and put her to bed. Don't let her talk. She ran all the way to Old Chester to get me," he explained to Henry Roberts.

Before he left the house that night he sat for a few minutes at Philippa's bedside. "My dear little girl," he said, in his kind, sensible voice, "the best thing to do is to forget it. It was a foolish thing to do—that charm business; but happily no harm is done. Now say nothing about it, and never do it again."

Philippa turned her shuddering face away. "Do it again? *Oh!*"

As William King went home he apologized to Jinny for that cut across her flanks by hanging the reins on the overhead hook and letting her plod along at her own pleasure. He was saying to himself that he hoped he had done right to tell the child to hold her tongue. "It was just tomfoolery," he argued; "there was no sin about it, so confession wouldn't do her any good; on the contrary, it would hurt a girl's self-respect to have a man know she had tried to catch him. But what a donkey he was not to see. . . . Oh yes; I'm sure I'm right," said William King. "I wonder how Dr. Lavendar would look at it?"

Philippa, at any rate, was satisfied with his advice. Perhaps the story of what she had done might have broken from her pale lips had her father asked any questions; but Henry Roberts had retreated into troubled silence. There had been one wonderful moment when he thought that at last his faith was to be justified and by the unbeliever himself! and he had cried out, with a passion deferred for more than thirty years: "The *Voice!*" But behold, the voice, babbling and meaningless, was nothing but sickness. No one could guess what the shock of that disappointment was. He was not able even to speak of it. So Philippa was asked no awkward questions, and her self-knowledge burned deep into her heart.

In the next few days, while the minister was slowly recovering in the great four-poster in Henry Roberts's guest-room, Philippa listened to Hannah's speculations as to the cause of his attack, and expressed no opinion. She was dumb when John Fenn tried to tell her how grateful he was to her for that terrible run through the darkness for his sake.

"You should not be grateful," she said, at last, in a whisper.

But he was grateful; and, furthermore, he was very happy in those days of slow recovery. The fact was that that night, when he had been so near death, he had heard Philippa, in his first dim moments of returning consciousness, stammering out those distracted words: "Perhaps God will forgive me." To John Fenn those words meant the crowning of all his efforts: she had repented!

"Truly," he said, lying very white and feeble on his pillow and looking into Philly's face when she brought him his gruel, "truly,

> "He moves in a mysterious way
> His wonders to perform!"

The "mysterious way" was the befalling of that terrible illness in Henry Roberts's house, so that Philippa should be impressed by it. "If my affliction has been blessed to any one else, I am glad to have suffered it," he said.

Philippa silently put a spoonful of gruel be-

THE BLOW OF HER REPLY ALMOST KNOCKED HIM BACK INTO HIS MINISTERIAL AFFECTATIONS

tween his lips; he swallowed it as quickly as he could.

"I heard you call upon God for forgiveness; the Lord is merciful and gracious!"

Philly said, very low, "Yes; oh *yes*."

So John Fenn thanked God, and took his gruel, and thought it was very good. He thought, also, that Miss Philippa was very good to be so good to him. In those next few days, before he was strong enough to be moved back to his own house, he thought more of her goodness and less of her salvation. It was then that he had his great moment, his revealing moment! All of a sudden, at the touch of Life, his honest artificiality had dropped from him, and he knew that he had never before known anything worth knowing! He knew he was in love. He knew it when he realized that he was not in the least troubled about her soul. "That is what she meant!" he thought; "she wanted me to care for her, before I cared for her soul." He was so simple in his acceptance of the revelation that she loved him, that when he went to ask her to be his wife the blow of her reply almost knocked him back into his ministerial affectations:

"No."

When John Fenn got home that evening he went into his study and shut the door. Mary came and pounded on it, but he only said, in a muffled voice: "No, Mary. Not now. Go away." He was praying for resignation to what

he told himself was the will of God. "The Lord is unwilling that my thoughts should be diverted from His service by my own personal happiness." Then he tried to put his thoughts on that service by deciding upon a text for his next sermon. But the texts which suggested themselves were not steadying to his bewildered mind:

"*Love one another.*" ("I certainly thought she loved me.")

"*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" ("I am, perhaps, personally unattractive to her; and yet I wonder why?")

He was not a conceited man; but, like all his sex, he really did "marvel" a little at the lack of feminine appreciation.

He marveled so much that a week later he took Mary and walked out to Mr. Roberts's house. This time Mary, to her disgust, was left with Miss Philly's father, while her brother and Miss Philly walked in the frosted garden. Later, when that walk was over, and the little sister trudged along at John Fenn's side in the direction of Perryville, she was very fretful because he would not talk to her. Again he was occupied, poor boy! in trying not to "marvel," and to be submissive to the divine will.

After that, for several months, he refused Mary's plea to be taken to visit Miss Philly. He had, he told himself, "submitted"; but submission left him very melancholy and solemn, and also a little resentful; indeed, he was so low in his

mind, that once he threw out a bitter hint to Dr. Lavendar,—who, according to his wont, put two and two together.

"Men in our profession, sir," said John Fenn, "must not expect personal happiness."

"Well," said Dr. Lavendar, meditatively, "perhaps if we don't expect it, the surprise of getting it makes it all the better. I expected it; but I've exceeded my expectations!"

"But you are not married," the young man said, impulsively.

Dr. Lavendar's face changed; "I hope you will marry, Fenn," he said, quietly. At which John Fenn said, "I am married to my profession; that is enough for any minister."

"You'll find your profession a mighty poor housekeeper," said Dr. Lavendar.

It was shortly after this that Mr. Fenn and his big roan broke through the snow-drifts and made their way to Henry Roberts's house. "I must speak to you alone, sir," he said to the Irvingite, who, seeing him approaching, had hastened to open the door for him and draw him in out of the cold sunshine.

What the caller had to say was brief and to the point: Why was his daughter so unkind? John Fenn did not feel now that the world—which meant Philippa—hated him. He felt—he could not help feeling—that she did not even dislike him; "on the contrary. . . ." So what reason had she for refusing him? But old Mr.

Roberts shook his head. "A young female does not have 'reasons,'" he said. But he was sorry for the youth, and he roused himself from his abstraction long enough to question his girl:

"He is a worthy young man, my Philippa. Why do you dislike him?"

"I do not dislike him."

"Then why—?" her father protested.

But Philly was silent.

Even Hannah came to the rescue:

"You'll get a crooked stick at the end, if you don't look out!"

Philly laughed; then her face fell. "I sha'n't have any stick, ever!"

It was in May that old Hannah, in her concern, confided her forebodings about the stick to Dr. King.

"I wonder," William said to himself, uneasily, "if I was wise to tell that child to hold her tongue? Perhaps they might have straightened it out between 'em before this, if she had told him and been done with it. I've a great mind to ask Dr. Lavendar."

He did ask him; at first with proper precautions not to betray a patient's confidence, but, at a word from Dr. Lavendar, tumbling into truthfulness.

"You are talking about young Philippa Roberts?" Dr. Lavendar announced, calmly, when William was half-way through his story of concealed identities.

"How did you guess it?" the doctor said, astonished; "oh, well, yes, I am. I guess there's no harm telling you—"

"Not the slightest," said Dr. Lavendar, "especially as I knew it already from the young man—I mean, I knew she wouldn't have him. But I didn't know why until your story dovetailed with his. William, the thing has festered in her! The lancet ought to have been used the next day. I believe she'd have been married by this time if she'd spoken out, then and there."

William King was much chagrined. "I thought, being a girl, you know, her pride, her self-respect—"

"Oh yes; the lancet hurts," Dr. Lavendar admitted; "but it's better than—well, I don't know the terms of your trade, Willy—but I guess you know what I mean?"

"I guess I do," said William King, thoughtfully. "Do you suppose it's too late now?"

"It will be more of an operation," Dr. Lavendar conceded.

"Could *I* tell him?" William said, after a while.

"I don't see why not," Dr. Lavendar said.

"I suppose I'd have to ask her permission?"

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Lavendar.

That talk between the physician of the soul and the physician of the body happened on the very night when John Fenn, in his study in Perryville, with Mary dozing on his knee, threw over, once and for all, what he had called "submission"

and made up his mind to get his girl! The very next morning he girded himself and walked forth upon the Pike toward Henry Roberts's house. He did not take Mary with him—but not because he meant to urge salvation on Miss Philly! As it happened, Dr. King, too, set out upon the Perryville road that morning, remarking to Jinny that if he had had his wits about him that night in November, she would have been saved the trip on this May morning; "For I've got to go all the way to Perryville and make a clean breast to that young man, Jane," he told her. There was no urging of the whip on Jinny's flanks on this trip, for the doctor had found a medical pamphlet in his mail, and he read it all the way, letting the reins hang from the crook of his elbow. It was owing to this method of driving that John Fenn reached the Roberts house before Jinny passed it, so she went on to Perryville, and then had to turn round to follow on his track.

"Brother went to see Miss Philly, and he wouldn't take me," Mary complained to William King, when he drew up at the minister's door; and the doctor was sympathetic to the extent of five cents for candy comfort.

But when Jinny reached the Roberts gate Dr. King saw John Fenn down in the garden with Philippa. "Ho—ho!" said William; "I guess I'll wait and see if he works out his own salvation." He hitched Jinny, and went in to find Philippa's father, and to him he freed his mind. The two

men sat on the porch and looked down over the tops of the lilac-bushes into the garden where they could just see the heads of the two young, unhappy people.

"It's nonsense, you know," said William King, "that Philly doesn't take that boy. He's head over heels in love with her."

"She is not attached to him in any such manner," Henry Roberts said; "I wonder a little at it, myself. He is a good youth."

The doctor looked at him wonderingly; it occurred to him that if he had a daughter he would understand her better than Philly's father understood her. "I think the child cares for him," he said; then, hesitatingly, he referred to John Fenn's sickness. "I suppose you know about it?" he said.

Philly's father bent his head; he knew, he thought, only too well; there was no divine revelation in a disordered digestion!

"Don't you think," William King said, smiling, "you might try to make her feel that she is wrong not to accept him, now that the charm has worked, so to speak?"

"The charm?" the old man repeated, vaguely.

"I thought you understood," the doctor said, frowning; then, after a minute's hesitation, he told him the facts.

Henry Roberts stared at him, shocked and silent; his girl, his Philippa, to have done such a thing! "So great a sin—my little Philly!" he said, faintly. He was pale with distress.

"My dear sir," Dr. King protested, impatiently, "don't talk about *sin* in connection with that child. I wish I'd held my tongue!"

Henry Roberts was silent. Philippa's share in John Fenn's mysterious illness removed it still further from that revelation, waited for during all these years with such passionate patience. He paid no attention to William King's reassurances; and his silence was so silencing that by and by the doctor stopped talking and looked down into the garden again. He observed that those two heads had not drawn any nearer together. It was not John Fenn's fault. . . .

"There can be no good reason," he was saying to Philippa. "If it is a bad reason, I will overcome it! Tell me why?"

She put her hand up to her lips and trembled.

"Come," he said; "it is my due, Philippa. I *will* know!"

Philippa shook her head. He took her other hand and stroked it, as one might stroke a child's hand to comfort and encourage it.

"You must tell me, beloved," he said.

Philippa looked at him with scared eyes; then, suddenly pulling her hands from his and turning away, she covered her face and burst into uncontrollable sobbing. He, confounded and frightened, followed her and tried to soothe her.

"Never mind, Philly, never mind! if you don't want to tell me—"

"I do want to tell you. I will tell you! You

will despise me. But I will tell you. *I did a wicked deed.* It was this very plant—here, where we stand, monk's-hood! It was poison. I didn't know—oh, I didn't know. The book said monk's-hood—it was a mistake. But I did a wicked deed. I tried to kill you—"

She swayed as she spoke, and then seemed to sink down and down, until she lay, a forlorn little heap, at his feet. For one dreadful moment he thought she had lost her senses. He tried to lift her, saying, with agitation:

"Philly! We will not speak of it—"

"I murdered you," she whispered. "I put the charm into your tea, to make you . . . love me. You didn't die. But it was murder. I meant—I meant no harm—"

He understood. He lifted her up and held her in his arms. Up on the porch William King saw that the two heads were close together!

"Why!" the young man said. "Why—but Philly! *You loved me!*"

"What difference does that make?" she said, heavily.

"It makes much difference to me," he answered; he put his hand on her soft hair and tried to press her head down on his shoulder. But she drew away.

"No; no."

"But—" he began. She interrupted him.

"Listen," she said; and then, sometimes in a whisper, sometimes breaking into a sob, she told

him the story of that November night. He could hardly hear it through.

"Love, you loved me! You will marry me."

"No; I am a wicked girl—a—a—an immodest girl—"

"My beloved, you meant no wrong—" He paused, seeing that she was not listening.

Her father and the doctor were coming down the garden path; William King, beaming with satisfaction at the proximity of those two heads, had summoned Henry Roberts to "come along and give 'em your blessing!"

But as he reached them, standing now apart, the doctor's smile faded—evidently something had happened. John Fenn, tense with distress, called to him with frowning command: "Doctor! Tell her, for Heaven's sake, tell her that it was nothing—that charm! Tell her she did no wrong."

"No one can do that," Henry Roberts said; "it was a sin."

"Now, look here—" Dr. King began.

"It was a sin to try to move by foolish arts the will of God."

Philippa turned to the young man, standing quivering beside her. "You see?" she said.

"No! No, I don't see—or if I do, never mind."

Just for a moment her face cleared. (Yes, truly, he was not thinking of her soul now!) But the gleam faded. "Oh, father, I am a great sinner," she whispered.

"No, you're not!" William King said.

"Yes, my Philippa, you are," Henry Roberts agreed, solemnly.

The lover made a despairing gesture: "Doctor King! tell her 'no!' 'no!'"

"Yes," her father went on, "it was a sin. Therefore, Philippa, *sin no more.* Did you pray that this young man's love might be given to you?"

Philippa said, in a whisper, "Yes."

"And it was given to you?"

"Yes."

"Philippa, was it the foolish weed that moved him to love?" She was silent. "My child, my Philly, it was your Saviour who moved the heart of this youth, because you asked Him. Will you do such despite to your Lord as to reject the gift He has given in answer to your prayer?" Philippa, with parted lips, was listening intently: 'The gift He had given!'

Dr. King dared not speak. John Fenn looked at him, and then at Philippa, and trembled. Except for the sound of a bird stirring in its nest overhead in the branches, a sunny stillness brooded over the garden. Then, suddenly, the stillness was shattered by a strange sound—a loud, cadenced chant, full of rhythmical repetitions. The three who heard it thrilled from head to foot; Henry Roberts did not seem to hear it: it came from his own lips.

"Oh, Philippa! Oh, Philippa! I do require —I do require that you accept your Saviour's

gift. Add not sin to sin. Oh, add not sin to sin by making prayer of no avail! Behold, He has set before thee an open door. Oh, let no man shut it. Oh, let no man shut it. . . ."

The last word fell into a low, wailing note. No one spoke. The bird rustled in the leaves above them; a butterfly wavered slowly down to settle on a purple flag in the sunshine. Philly's eyes filled with blessed tears. She stretched out her arms to her father and smiled. But it was John Fenn who caught those slender, trembling arms against his breast; and, looking over at the old man, he said, softly, "*The Voice of God.*"

. . . . . .

. . . "and I," said William King, telling the story that night to Dr. Lavendar—"I just wanted to say 'the voice of *common sense!*'"

"My dear William," said the old man, gently, "the most beautiful thing in the world is the knowledge that comes to you, when you get to be as old as I am, that they are the same thing."

AN ENCORE

AN ENCORE

ACCORDING to Old Chester, to be romantic was just one shade less reprehensible than to put on airs. Captain Alfred Price, in all his seventy years, had never been guilty of putting on airs, but certainly he had something to answer for in the way of romance.

However, in the days when we children used to see him pounding up the street from the post-office, reading, as he walked, a newspaper held at arm's-length in front of him, he was far enough from romance. He was seventy years old, he weighed over two hundred pounds, his big head was covered with a shock of grizzled red hair; his pleasures consisted in polishing his old sextant and playing on a small mouth-harmonicon. As to his vices, it was no secret that he kept a fat black bottle in the chimney closet in his own room, and occasionally he swore strange oaths about his grandmother's nightcap. "He used to blaspheme," his daughter-in-law said; "but I said, 'Not in my presence, if you please!' So now he just says this foolish thing about a night-cap." Mrs. Drayton said that this reform would

be one of the jewels in Mrs. Cyrus Price's crown; and added that she prayed that some day the Captain would give up tobacco and *rum*. "I am a poor, feeble creature," said Mrs. Drayton; "I cannot do much for my fellow-men in active mission-work,—but I give my prayers." However, neither Mrs. Drayton's prayers nor Mrs. Cyrus's active mission-work had done more than mitigate the blasphemy; the "rum" (which was good Monongahela whisky) was still on hand; and as for tobacco, except when sleeping, eating, playing on his harmonicon, or dozing through one of Dr. Lavendar's sermons, the Captain smoked every moment, the ashes of his pipe or cigar falling unheeded on a vast and wrinkled expanse of waistcoat.

No; he was not a romantic object. But we girls, watching him stump past the school-room window to the post-office, used to whisper to one another, "Just think! *he eloped.*"

There was romance for you!

To be sure, the elopement had not quite come off, but except for the very end, it was all as perfect as a story. Indeed, the failure at the end made it all the better: angry parents, broken hearts—only, the worst of it was, the hearts did not stay broken! He went and married somebody else; and so did she. You would have supposed she would have died. I am sure, in her place, any one of us would have died. And yet, as Lydia Wright said, "How could a young lady die for

WHEN ALFRED PRICE FELL IN LOVE WITH MISS LETTY MORRIS

a young gentleman with ashes all over his waistcoat?"

But when Alfred Price fell in love with Miss Letty Morris, he was not indifferent to his waistcoat, nor did he weigh two hundred pounds. He was slender and ruddy-cheeked, with tossing red-brown curls. If he swore, it was not by his grandmother nor her nightcap; if he drank, it was hard cider (which can often accomplish as much as "rum"); if he smoked it was in secret, behind the stable. He wore a stock, and (on Sunday) a ruffled shirt; a high-waisted coat with two brass buttons behind, and very tight pantaloons. At that time he attended the Seminary for Youths in Upper Chester. Upper Chester was then, as in our time, the seat of learning in the township, the Female Academy being there, too. Both were boarding-schools, but the young people came home to spend Sunday; and their weekly returns, all together in the stage, were responsible for more than one Old Chester match. . . .

"The air," says Miss, sniffing genteelly as the coach jolts past the blossoming May orchards, "is most agreeably perfumed. And how fair is the prospect from this hilltop!"

"Fair indeed!" responds her companion, staring boldly.

Miss bridles and bites her lip.

"*I* was not observing the landscape," the young gentleman hastens to explain.

In those days (Miss Letty was born in 1804,

and was eighteen when she and the ruddy Alfred sat on the back seat of the coach)—in those days the conversation of Old Chester youth was more elegant than in our time. We, who went to Miss Bailey's school, were sad degenerates in the way of manners and language; at least so our elders told us. When Lydia Wright said, "Oh my, what an awful snow-storm!" dear Miss Ellen was displeased. "Lydia," said she, "is there anything 'awe'-inspiring in this display of the elements?"

"No, 'm," faltered poor Lydia.

"Then," said Miss Bailey, gravely, "your statement that the storm is 'awful' is a falsehood. I do not suppose, my dear, that you intentionally told an untruth; it was an exaggeration. But an exaggeration, though not perhaps a falsehood, is unladylike, and should be avoided by persons of refinement." Just here the question arises: what would Miss Ellen (now in heaven) say if she could hear Lydia's Lydia, just home from college, remark— But no: Miss Ellen's precepts shall protect these pages.

But in the days when Letty Morris looked out of the coach window, and young Alfred murmured that the prospect was fair indeed, conversation was perfectly correct. And it was still decorous even when it got beyond the coach period and reached a point where Old Chester began to take notice. At first it was young Old Chester which giggled. Later old Old Chester made some comments; it was then that Alfred's mother mentioned

the matter to Alfred's father. "He is young, and, of course, foolish," Mrs. Price explained. And Mr. Price said that though folly was incidental to Alfred's years, it must be checked.

"Just check it," said Mr. Price.

Then Miss Letty's mother awoke to the situation, and said, "Fy, fy, Letitia! let me hear no more of this foolishness."

So it was that these two young persons were plunged in grief. Oh, glorious grief of thwarted love! When they met now, they did not talk of the landscape. Their conversation, though no doubt as genteel as before, was all of broken hearts. But again Letty's mother found out, and went in wrath to call on Alfred's family. It was decided between them that the young man should be sent away from home. "To save him," says the father. "To protect my daughter," says Mrs. Morris.

But Alfred and Letty had something to say. . . . It was in December; there was a snow-storm —a storm which Lydia Wright would certainly have called "awful"; but it did not interfere with true love; these two children met in the graveyard—of all places!—to swear undying constancy. Alfred's lantern came twinkling through the flakes, as he threaded his way across the hillside among the tombstones, and found Letty just inside the entrance, standing with her black serving-woman under a tulip-tree. The negress, chattering with cold and fright, kept plucking at

the girl's pelisse to hurry her; but once Alfred was at her side, Letty was indifferent to storm and ghosts. As for Alfred, he was too cast down to think of them.

"Letty, they will part us."

"No, my dear Alfred, no!"

"Yes. Yes, they will. Oh, if you were only mine!"

Miss Letty sighed.

"Will you be true to me, Letty? I am to go on a sailing-vessel to China, to be gone two years. Will you wait for me?"

Letty gave a little cry; two years! Her black woman twitched her sleeve.

"Miss Let, it's gittin' cole, honey."

"(Don't, Flora.)—Alfred, *two years!* Oh, Alfred, that is an eternity. Why, I should be—I should be twenty!"

The lantern, set on a tombstone beside them, blinked in a snowy gust. Alfred covered his face with his hands—he was shaken to his soul; the little, gay creature beside him thrilled at a sound from behind those hands.

"Alfred—" she said, faintly; then she hid her face against his arm; "my dear Alfred, I will, if you desire it—fly with you!"

Alfred, with a gasp, lifted his head and stared at her. His slower mind had seen nothing but separation and despair; but the moment the word was said he was aflame. What! Would she? Could she? Adorable creature!

"Miss Let, my feet done git cole—"

"(Flora, be still!)—Yes, Alfred, yes. I am thine."

The boy caught her in his arms. "But I am to be sent away on Monday! My angel, could you —fly, to-morrow?"

And Letty, her face still hidden against his shoulder, nodded.

Then, while the shivering Flora stamped, and beat her arms, and the lantern flared and sizzled under the snowflakes, Alfred made their plans, which were simple to the point of childishness. "My own!" he said, when it was all arranged; then he held the lantern up and looked into her face, blushing and determined, with snow gleaming on the curls that pushed out from under her big hood. "You will meet me at the minister's?" he said, passionately. "You will not fail me?"

"I will not fail you!" she said; and laughed joyously; but the young man's face was white.

She kept her word; and with the assistance of Flora, romantic again when her feet were warm, all went as they planned. Clothes were packed, savings-banks opened, and a chaise abstracted from the Price stable.

"It is my intention," said the youth, "to return to my father the value of the vehicle and nag, as soon as I can secure a position which will enable me to support my Letty in comfort and fashion."

On the night of the elopement the two children

met at the minister's house. (Yes, the very old Rectory to which we Old Chester children went every Saturday afternoon to Dr. Lavendar's Collect class. But of course there was no Dr. Lavendar there in those days).

Well; Alfred requested this minister to pronounce them man and wife; but he coughed and poked the fire. "I am of age," Alfred insisted; "I am twenty-two." Then Mr. Smith said he must first go and put on his bands and surplice; and Alfred said, "If you please, sir." And off went Mr. Smith—*and sent a note to Alfred's father and Letty's mother!*

We girls used to wonder what the lovers talked about while they waited for the return of the surpliced traitor. Ellen Dale always said they were foolish to wait. "Why didn't they go right off?" said Ellen. "If *I* were going to elope, I shouldn't bother to get married. But, oh, think how they felt when in walked those cruel parents!"

The story was that they were torn weeping from each other's arms; that Letty was sent to bed for two days on bread and water; that Alfred was packed off to Philadelphia the very next morning, and sailed in less than a week. They did not see each other again.

But the end of the story was not romantic at all. Letty, although she crept about for a while in deep disgrace, and brooded upon death—that interesting impossibility, so dear to youth—*married*, if you please! when she was twenty, somebody

called North,—and went away to live. When Alfred came back, seven years later, he got married, too. He married a Miss Barkley. He used to go away on long voyages, so perhaps he wasn't really fond of her. We hoped he wasn't, for we liked Captain Price.

In our day Captain Price was a widower. He had given up the sea, and settled down to live in Old Chester; his son, Cyrus, lived with him, and his languid daughter-in-law—a young lady of dominant feebleness, who ruled the two men with that most powerful domestic rod, foolish weakness. This combination in a woman will cause a mountain (a masculine mountain) to fly from its firm base; while kindness, justice, and good sense, leave it upon unshaken foundations of selfishness. Mrs. Cyrus was a Goliath of silliness; when billowing black clouds heaped themselves in the west on a hot afternoon, she turned pale with apprehension, and the Captain and Cyrus ran for four tumblers, into which they put the legs of her bed, where, cowering among the feathers, she lay cold with fear and perspiration. Every night the Captain screwed down all the windows on the lower floor; in the morning Cyrus pulled the screws out. Cyrus had a pretty taste in horseflesh, but Gussie cried so when he once bought a trotter that he had long ago resigned himself to a friendly beast of twenty-seven years, who could not go much out of a walk because he had string-halt in both hind legs.

But one must not be too hard on Mrs. Cyrus. In the first place, she was not born in Old Chester,—which was against her, to begin with. But, added to that, just think of her name! The effect of names upon character is not considered as it should be. If one is called Gussie for thirty years, it is almost impossible not to become gussie after a while. Mrs. Cyrus could not be Augusta; few women can; but it was easy to be gussie—irresponsible, silly, selfish. She had a vague, flat laugh, she ate a great deal of candy, and she was afraid of— But one cannot catalogue Mrs. Cyrus's fears. They were as the sands of the sea for number. And these two men were governed by them. Only when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed will it be understood why a man loves a fool; but why he obeys her is obvious enough: Fear is the greatest power in the world; Gussie was afraid of thunder-storms, or what not; but the Captain and Cyrus were afraid of Gussie! A hint of tears in her pale eyes, and her husband would sigh with anxiety and Captain Price slip his pipe into his pocket and sneak out of the room. Doubtless Cyrus would often have been glad to follow him, but the old gentleman glared when his son showed a desire for his company.

"Want to come and smoke with me? 'Your granny was Murray!'—you're sojering. You're first mate; you belong on the bridge in storms. I'm before the mast. Tend to your business!"

It was forty-eight years before Letty and Alfred saw each other again—or at least before persons calling themselves by those old names saw each other. Were they Letty and Alfred—this tousled, tangled, good-humored old man, ruddy and cowed, and this small, bright-eyed old lady, Mrs. North, led about by a devoted daughter? Certainly these two persons bore no resemblance to the boy and girl torn from each other's arms that cold December night. Alfred had been mild and slow; Captain Price (except when his daughter-in-law raised her finger) was a pleasant old roaring lion. Letty had been a gay, high-spirited little creature, not as retiring, perhaps, as a young female should be, and certainly self-willed; Mrs. North was completely under the thumb of her daughter Mary. Not that "under the thumb" means unhappiness; Mary North desired only her mother's welfare, and lived fiercely for that single purpose.

From morning until night (and, indeed, until morning again, for often she rose from her bed to see that there was no draught from the crack of the open window), all through the twenty-four hours she was on duty.

When this excellent daughter appeared in Old Chester and said she was going to hire a house, and bring her mother back to end her days in the home of her girlhood, Old Chester displayed a friendly interest; when she decided upon a house on Main Street, directly opposite Captain Price's,

it began to recall the romance of that thwarted elopement.

"Do you suppose she knows that story about old Alfred Price and her mother?" said Old Chester; and it looked sidewise at Miss North with polite curiosity. This was not altogether because of her mother's romantic past, but because of her own manners and clothes. With painful exactness, Miss North endeavored to follow the fashion; but she looked as if articles of clothing had been thrown at her and some had stuck. As to her manners, Old Chester was divided; Mrs. David Baily said, with delicate disgust, that they were bad; but Mrs. Barkley said that the trouble was she hadn't any manners; and as for Dr. Lavendar, he insisted that she was just shy. But, as Mrs. Drayton said, that was like Dr. Lavendar, always making excuses for wrong-doing! "Which," said Mrs. Drayton, "is a strange thing for a minister to do. For my part, I cannot understand impoliteness in a *Christian* female. But we must not judge," Mrs. Drayton ended, with what Willy King called her "holy look." Without wishing to "judge," it may be said that, in the matter of manners, Miss Mary North, palpitatingly anxious to be polite, told the truth; and as everybody knows, truthfulness and agreeable manners are often divorced on the ground of incompatibility. Miss North said things that other people only thought. When Mrs. Willy King remarked that, though she did not pretend

to be a good housekeeper, she had the backs of her pictures dusted every other day, Miss North, her chin trembling with timidity, said, with a panting smile:

"That's not good housekeeping; it's foolish waste of time." And when Neddy Dilworth's wife confessed, coquettishly, that one would hardly take her to be a year or two older than her husband, would one? Mary North exclaimed, in utter astonishment: "Is that all? Why, you look twelve years older!" Of course such truthfulness was far from genteel,—though Old Chester was not as displeased as you might have supposed.

While Miss North, timorous and sincere (and determined to be polite), was putting the house in order before sending for her mother, Old Chester invited her to tea, and asked her many questions about Letty and the late Mr. North. But nobody asked whether she knew that her opposite neighbor, Captain Price, might have been her father—at least that was the way Miss Ellen's girls expressed it. Captain Price himself did not enlighten the daughter he did not have; but he went rolling across the street, and pulling off his big shabby felt hat, stood at the foot of the steps, and roared out: "Morning! Anything I can do for you?" Miss North, indoors, hanging window-curtains, her mouth full of tacks, shook her head. Then she removed the tacks and came to the front door.

"Do you smoke, sir?"

Captain Price removed his pipe from his mouth and looked at it. "Why! I believe I do, sometimes," he said.

"I inquired," said Miss North, smiling tremulously, her hands gripped hard together, "because, if you do, I will ask you to desist when passing our windows."

Captain Price was so dumfounded that for a moment words failed him. Then he said, meekly, "Does your mother object to tobacco smoke, ma'am?"

"It is injurious to all ladies' throats," Miss North explained, her voice quivering and determined.

"Does your mother resemble you, madam?" said Captain Price, slowly.

"Oh no! my mother is pretty. She has my eyes, but that's all."

"I didn't mean in looks," said the old man; "she did not look in the least like you; not in the least! She was a very pretty girl. I mean in her views?"

"Her views? I don't think my mother has any particular views," Miss North answered, hesitatingly; "I spare her all thought," she ended, and her thin face bloomed suddenly with love.

Old Chester rocked with the Captain's report of his call; and Mrs. Cyrus told her husband that she only wished this lady would stop his father's smoking altogether.

"Just look at his ashes," said Gussie; "I put

saucers round everywhere to catch 'em, but he shakes 'em off anywhere—right on the carpet! And if you say anything, he just says, 'Oh, they'll keep the moths away!' I worry so for fear he'll set the house on fire."

Mrs. Cyrus was so moved by Miss North's active mission-work that the very next day she wandered across the street to call. "I hope I'm not interrupting you," she began, "but I thought I'd just—"

"Yes; you are," said Miss North; "but never mind; stay if you want to." She tried to smile, but she looked at the duster which she had put down upon Mrs. Cyrus's entrance.

Gussie wavered as to whether to take offense, but decided not to—at least not until she could make the remark which was buzzing in her small mind. It seemed strange, she said, that Mrs. North should come, not only to Old Chester, but right across the street from Captain Price!

"Why?" said Mary North, briefly.

"*Why?*" said Mrs. Cyrus, with faint animation. "Gracious! is it possible that you don't know about your mother and my father-in-law?"

"What about them?"

"Why, you know," said Mrs. Cyrus, with her light cackle, "your mother was a little romantic when she was young. No doubt she has conquered it by this time. But she tried to make my father-in-law elope with her."

"What!"

"Oh, bygones should be bygones," Mrs. Cyrus said, soothingly; "forgive and forget, you know. I have no doubt she is perfectly—well, perfectly correct, now. If there's anything I can do to assist you, ma'am, I'll send my husband over"; and then she lounged away, leaving poor Mary North silent with indignation. But that night at tea Gussie said that she thought strong-minded ladies were very unladylike; "they say she's strong-minded," she added, languidly.

"Lady!" said the Captain. "She's a man-o'-war's-man in petticoats."

Gussie giggled.

"She's as flat as a lath," the Captain declared; "if it hadn't been for her face, I wouldn't have known whether she was coming bow or stern on."

"I think," said Mrs. Cyrus, "that that woman has some motive in bringing her mother back here; and *right across the street*, too!"

"What motive?" said Cyrus, mildly curious.

But Augusta waited for conjugal privacy to explain herself: "Cyrus, I worry so, because I'm sure that woman thinks she can catch your father again. Oh, just listen to that harmonicon downstairs! It sets my teeth on edge!"

Then Cyrus, the silent, servile first mate, broke out: "Gussie, you're a fool!"

And Augusta cried all night, and showed herself at the breakfast-table lantern-jawed and sunken-eyed; and her father-in-law judged it wise to sprinkle his cigar ashes behind the stable.

The day that Mrs. North arrived in Old Chester, Mrs. Cyrus commanded the situation; she saw the daughter get out of the stage, and hurry into the house for a chair so that the mother might descend more easily. She also saw a little, white-haired old lady take that opportunity to leap nimbly, and quite unaided, from the swinging step of the coach.

"Now, mother!" expostulated Mary North, returning, chair in hand, and breathless, "you might have broken your limb! Here, take my arm."

Meekly, after her moment of freedom, the little lady put her hand on that gaunt arm, and tripped up the path and into the house, where, alas! Augusta Price lost sight of them. Yet even she, with all her disapproval of strong-minded ladies, must have admired the tenderness of the man-o'-war's-man. Miss North put her mother into a big chair, and hurried to bring a dish of curds.

"I'm not hungry," protested Mrs. North.

"Never mind. It will do you good."

With a sigh the little old lady ate the curds, looking about her with curious eyes. "Why, we're right across the street from the old Price house!" she said.

"Did you know them, mother?" demanded Miss North.

"Dear me, yes," said Mrs. North, twinkling. "Why, I'd forgotten all about it, but the eldest

boy— Now, what was his name? Al—something. Alfred—Albert; no, Alfred. He was a beau of mine."

"Mother! I don't think it's refined to use such a word."

"Well, he wanted me to elope with him," Mrs. North said, gayly; "if that isn't being a beau, I don't know what is. I haven't thought of it for years."

"If you've finished your curds you must lie down," said Miss North.

"Oh, I'll just look about—"

"No; you are tired. You must lie down."

"Who is that stout old gentleman going into the Price house?" Mrs. North said, lingering at the window.

"Oh, that's your Alfred Price," her daughter answered; and added, that she hoped her mother would be pleased with the house. "We have boarded so long, I think you'll enjoy a home of your own."

"Indeed I shall!" cried Mrs. North, her eyes snapping with delight. "Mary, I'll wash the breakfast dishes, as my mother used to do!"

"Oh no," Mary North protested; "it would tire you. I mean to take every care from your mind."

"But," Mrs. North pleaded, "you have so much to do; and—"

"Never mind about me," said the daughter, earnestly; "you are my first consideration."

"I know it, my dear," said Mrs. North, meekly. And when Old Chester came to make its call, one of the first things she said was that her Mary was such a good daughter. Miss North, her anxious face red with determination, bore out the assertion by constantly interrupting the conversation to bring a footstool, or shut a window, or put a shawl over her mother's knees. "My mother's limb troubles her," she explained to visitors (in point of modesty, Mary North did not leave her mother a leg to stand on); then she added, breathlessly, with her tremulous smile, that she wished they would please not talk too much. "Conversation tires her," she explained. At which the pretty old lady opened and closed her hands, and protested that she was not tired at all. But the callers departed. As the door closed behind them, Mrs. North was ready to cry.

"Now, Mary, really!" she began.

"Mother, I don't care! I don't like to say a thing like that, though I'm sure I always try to speak politely. But it's the truth, and to save you I would tell the truth no matter how painful it was to do so."

"But I enjoy seeing people, and—"

"It is bad for you to be tired," Mary said, her thin face quivering still with the effort she had made; "and they sha'n't tire you while I am here to protect you." Her protection never flagged. When Captain Price called, she asked him to please converse in a low tone, as noise was bad

for her mother. "He had been here a good while before I came in," she defended herself to Mrs. North, afterwards; "and I'm sure I spoke politely."

The fact was, the day the Captain came, Miss North was out. Her mother had seen him pounding up the street, and hurrying to the door, called out, gayly, in her sweet old, piping voice, "Alfred—Alfred Price!"

The Captain turned and looked at her. There was just one moment's pause; perhaps he tried to bridge the years, and to believe that it was Letty who spoke to him—Letty, whom he had last seen that wintry night, pale and weeping, in the slender green sheath of a fur-trimmed pelisse. If so, he gave it up; this plump, white-haired, bright-eyed old lady, in a wide-spreading, rustling black silk dress, was not Letty. She was Mrs. North.

The Captain came across the street, waving his newspaper, and saying, "So you've cast anchor in the old port, ma'am?"

"My daughter is not at home; do come in," she said, smiling and nodding. Captain Price hesitated; then he put his pipe in his pocket and followed her into the parlor. "Sit down," she cried, gayly. "Well, *Alfred!*"

"Well—*Mrs. North!*" he said; then they both laughed, and she began to ask questions: Who was dead? Who had so and so married? "There are not many of us left," she said. "The two

Ferris girls and Theophilus Morrison and Johnny Gordon—he came to see me yesterday. And Matty Dilworth; she was younger than I—oh, by ten years. She married a Wharton, didn't she? I hear he didn't turn out well. You married a Barkley girl, didn't you? Was it the oldest girl or the second sister?"

"It was the second—Jane. Yes, poor Jane. I lost her in 'forty-five."

"You have children?" she said, sympathetically.

"I've got a boy," he said; "but he's married."

"My girl has never married; she's a good daughter,"—Mrs. North broke off with a nervous laugh; "here she is, now!"

Mary North, who had suddenly appeared in the doorway, gave a questioning sniff, and the Captain's hand sought his guilty pocket, where that pipe was lurking; but Miss North only said: "How do you do, sir? Now, mother, don't talk too much and get tired." She stopped and tried to smile, but the painful color came into her face. "And—if you please, Captain Price, will you speak in a low tone? Large, noisy persons exhaust the oxygen in the air, and—"

"*Mary!*" cried poor Mrs. North; but the Captain, clutching his old felt hat, began to hoist himself up from the sofa, scattering ashes about as he did so. Mary North, looking at them, compressed her lips.

"I tell my daughter-in-law they'll keep the moths away," the old gentleman said, sheepishly.

"I use camphor," said Miss North. "Flora must bring a dust-pan."

"Flora?" Alfred Price said. "Now, what's my association with that name?"

"She was our old cook," Mrs. North explained; "this Flora is her daughter. But you never saw old Flora?"

"Why, yes, I did," the old man said, slowly; his eyes narrowed a little, and he smiled. "Yes. I remember Flora. Well, good-by,—Mrs. North."

"Good-by, Alfred. Come again," she said, cheerfully.

"Mother, here's your beef tea," said a brief voice.

Alfred Price fled. He met his son just as he was entering his own house, and burst into a confidence: "Cy, my boy, come aft and splice the main-brace. Cyrus, what a female! She knocked me higher than Gilroy's kite. And her mother was as sweet a girl as you ever saw!" He drew his son into a little, low-browed, dingy room at the end of the hall. Its grimy untidiness matched the old Captain's clothes, but it was his one spot of refuge in his own house; here he could scatter his tobacco ashes almost unrebuked, and play on his harmonicon without seeing Gussie wince and draw in her breath; for Mrs. Cyrus rarely entered the "cabin." "I worry so about its disorderliness that I won't go in," she used to say, in a resigned way. The Captain accepted her decision with resignation of his own. "Crafts of your bottom can't navigate in these waters,"

he agreed, earnestly; and, indeed, the room was so cluttered with his belongings that voluminous hoop-skirts could not get steerageway. "He has so much rubbish," Gussie complained; but it was precious rubbish to the old man. His sea-chest was behind the door; a blow-fish, stuffed and varnished, hung from the ceiling; two colored prints of the "Barque *Letty M.*, 800 tons," decorated the walls; his sextant, polished daily by his big, clumsy hands, hung over the mantelpiece, on which were many dusty treasures—the mahogany spoke of an old steering-wheel; a whale's tooth; two Chinese wrestlers, in ivory; a fan of spreading white coral; a conch-shell, its beautiful red lip serving to hold a loose bunch of cigars. In the chimney-breast was a little door, and the Captain, pulling his son into the room after that call upon Mrs. North, fumbled in his pocket for the key. "Here," he said; "(as the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina)—Cyrus, she handed round *beef tea!*"

But Cyrus was to receive still further enlightenment on the subject of his opposite neighbor:

"She called him in. I heard her, with my own ears! 'Alfred,' she said, 'come in.' Cyrus, mark my words: she has designs; oh, I worry so about it! He ought to be protected. He is very old, and, of course, foolish. You ought to check it at once."

"Gussie, I don't like you to talk that way about my father," Cyrus began.

"You'll like it less later on. He'll go and see her to-morrow."

"Why shouldn't he go and see her to-morrow?" Cyrus said, and added a modest bad word; which made Gussie cry. And yet, in spite of what his wife called his "blasphemy," Cyrus began to be vaguely uncomfortable whenever he saw his father put his pipe in his pocket and go across the street. And as the winter brightened into spring, the Captain went quite often. So, for that matter, did other old friends of Mrs. North's generation, who by and by began to smile at one another, and say, "Well, Alfred and Letty are great friends!" For, because Captain Price lived right across the street, he went most of all. At least, that was what Miss North said to herself with obvious common sense—until Mrs. Cyrus put her on the right track. . . .

"What!" gasped Mary North. "But it's impossible!"

"It would be very unbecoming, considering their years," said Gussie; "but I worry so, because, you know, nothing is impossible when people are foolish; and of course, at their age, they are apt to be foolish."

So the seed was dropped. Certainly he did come very often. Certainly her mother seemed very glad to see him. Certainly they had very long talks. Mary North shivered with apprehension. But it was not until a week later that this miserable suspicion grew strong enough to

find words. It was after tea, and the two ladies were sitting before a little fire. Mary North had wrapped a shawl about her mother, and given her a footstool, and pushed her chair nearer the fire, and then pulled it away, and opened and shut the parlor door three times to regulate the draught. Then she sat down in the corner of the sofa, exhausted but alert.

"If there's anything you want, mother, you'll be sure and tell me?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I think I'd better put another shawl over your limbs?"

"Oh no, indeed!"

"Mother, are you *sure* you don't feel a draught?"

"No, Mary; and it wouldn't hurt me if I did!"

"I was only trying to make you comfortable—"

"I know that, my dear; you are a very good daughter. Mary, I think it would be nice if I made a cake. So many people call, and—"

"I'll make it to-morrow."

"Oh, I'll make it myself," Mrs. North protested, eagerly; "I'd really enjoy—"

"Mother! Tire yourself out in the kitchen? No, indeed! Flora and I will see to it."

Mrs. North sighed.

Her daughter sighed too; then suddenly burst out: "Old Captain Price comes here pretty often."

Mrs. North nodded pleasantly. "That daughter-in-law doesn't half take care of him. His clothes

are dreadfully shabby. There was a button off his coat to-day. And she's a foolish creature."

"Foolish? She's an unlady-like person!" cried Miss North, with so much feeling that her mother looked at her in mild astonishment. "And coarse, too," said Mary North; "I think married ladies are apt to be coarse. From association with men, I suppose."

"What has she done?" demanded Mrs. North, much interested.

"She hinted that he—that you—"

"Well?"

"That he came here to—to see you."

"Well, who else would he come to see? Not you!" said her mother.

"She hinted that he might want to—to marry you."

"Well—upon my word! I knew she was a ridiculous creature, but really—!"

Mary's face softened with relief. "Of course she is foolish; but—"

"Poor Alfred! What has he ever done to have such a daughter-in-law? Mary, the Lord gives us our children; but *Somebody Else* gives us our in-laws!"

"Mother!" said Mary North, horrified, "you do say such things! But really he oughtn't to come so often. People will begin to notice it; and then they'll talk. I'll—I'll take you away from Old Chester rather than have him bother you."

"Mary, you are just as foolish as his daughter-in-law," said Mrs. North, impatiently.

And somehow poor Mary North's heart sank.

Nor was she the only perturbed person in town that night. Mrs. Cyrus had a headache, so it was necessary for Cyrus to hold her hand and assure her that Willy King said a headache did not mean brain-fever.

"Willy King doesn't know everything. If he had headaches like mine, he wouldn't be so sure. I am always worrying about things, and I believe my brain can't stand it. And now I've got your father to worry about!"

"Better try and sleep, Gussie. I'll put some Kaliston on your head."

"Kaliston! Kaliston won't keep me from worrying. Oh, listen to that harmonicon!"

"Gussie, I'm sure he isn't thinking of Mrs. North."

"Mrs. North is thinking of him, which is a great deal more dangerous. Cyrus, you *must* ask Dr. Lavendar to interfere."

As this was at least the twentieth assault upon poor Cyrus's common sense, the citadel trembled.

"Do you wish me to go into brain-fever before your eyes, just from worry?" Gussie demanded. "You *must* go!"

"Well, maybe, perhaps, to-morrow—"

"To-night—to-night," said Augusta, faintly.

And Cyrus surrendered.

"Look under the bed before you go," Gussie murmured.

Cyrus looked. "Nobody there," he said, reassuringly; and went on tiptoe out of the darkened, cologne-scented room. But as he passed along the hall, and saw his father in his little cabin of a room, smoking placidly, and polishing his sextant with loving hands, Cyrus's heart reproached him.

"How's her head, Cy?" the Captain called out.

"Oh, better, I guess," Cyrus said. ("I'll be hanged if I speak to Dr. Lavendar!")

"That's good," said the Captain, beginning to hoist himself up out of his chair. "Going out? Hold hard, and I'll go 'long. I want to call on Mrs. North."

Cyrus stiffened. "Cold night, sir," he remonstrated.

"'Your granny was Murray, and wore a black nightcap!'" said the Captain; "you are getting delicate in your old age, Cy." He got up, and plunged into his coat, and tramped out, slamming the door heartily behind him—for which, later, poor Cyrus got the credit. "Where you bound?"

"Oh—down-street," said Cyrus, vaguely.

"Sealed orders?" said the Captain, with never a bit of curiosity in his big, kind voice; and Cyrus felt as small as he was. But when he left the old man at Mrs. North's door, he was uneasy again. Maybe Gussie was right? Women are keener

about those things than men. And his uneasiness actually carried him to Dr. Lavendar's study, where he tried to appear at ease by patting Danny.

"What's the matter with you, Cyrus?" said Dr. Lavendar, looking at him over his spectacles. (Dr. Lavendar, in his wicked old heart, always wanted to call this young man Cipher; but, so far, grace had been given him to withstand temptation.) "What's wrong?" he said.

Cyrus, somehow, told his troubles.

At first Dr. Lavendar chuckled; then he frowned. "Gussie put you up to this, Cy—*rus?*" he said.

"Well, my wife's a woman—" Cyrus began.

"So I have always supposed," said Dr. Lavendar, dryly.

"—and they're keener on such matters than men; and she said, perhaps you would—would—"

"*What?*" Dr. Lavendar rapped on the table with the bowl of his pipe, so loudly that Danny opened one eye. "Would what?"

"Well," Cyrus stammered, "you know, Dr. Lavendar, as Gussie says, 'there's no fo—'"

"You needn't finish it," Dr. Lavendar interrupted, dryly; "I've heard it before. Gussie didn't say anything about a young fool, did she?" Then he eyed Cyrus. "Or a middle-aged one? I've seen middle-aged fools that could beat us old fellows hollow."

"Oh, but Mrs. North is far beyond middle age," said Cyrus, earnestly.

Dr. Lavendar shook his head. "Well, well!" he said. "To think that Alfred Price's son should be such a— He's as sensible a man as I know!"

"Until now," Cyrus amended. "He's been perfectly sensible until now. But Gussie thought you'd better caution him. We don't want him, at his time of life, to make a mistake."

"It's much more to the point that I should caution you not to make a mistake," said Dr. Lavendar; then he rapped on the table again, sharply. "The Captain has no such idea—unless Gussie has given it to him. Cyrus, my advice to you is to go home and tell your wife not to be a goose. I'll tell her, if you want me to?"

"Oh no, no!" said Cyrus, very much frightened. "I'm afraid you'd hurt her feelings."

"I'm afraid I should," said Dr. Lavendar, grimly.

"She's so sensitive," Cyrus tried to excuse her; "you can't think how sensitive she is, and timid. I never knew anybody so timid! Why, she makes me look under the bed every night, for fear there's somebody there!"

"Well, next time, tell her 'two men and a dog'; that will take her mind off your father." It must be confessed that Dr. Lavendar was out of temper —a sad fault in one of his age, as Mrs. Drayton often said. Indeed, his irritability was so marked that Cyrus finally slunk off, uncomforted, and afraid to meet Gussie's eye, even under its bandage of a cologne-scented handkerchief.

However, he had to meet it, and he tried to make the best of his own humiliation by saying that Dr. Lavendar was shocked at the idea of the Captain being interested in Mrs. North. "He said father had been, until now, as sensible a man as he knew, and he didn't believe he would think of such a dreadful thing. And neither do I, Gussie, honestly," Cyrus said.

"But Mrs. North isn't sensible," Gussie protested, "and she'll—"

"Dr. Lavendar said 'there was no fool like a middle-aged fool,'" Cyrus agreed.

"Middle-aged? She's as old as Methuselah!"

"That's what I told him," said Cyrus.

By the end of April Old Chester smiled. How could it help it? Gussie worried so that she took frequent occasion to point out possibilities; and after the first gasp of incredulity, one could hear a faint echo of the giggles of forty-eight years before. Mary North heard it, and her heart burned within her.

"It's got to stop," she said to herself, passionately; "I must speak to his son."

But her throat was dry at the thought. It seemed as if it would kill her to speak to a man on such a subject, even to as little of a man as Cyrus Price. But, poor, shy tigress! to save her mother, what would she not do? In her pain and fright she said to Mrs. North that if the Captain kept on making her uncom-

fortable and conspicuous, they would leave Old Chester!

Mrs. North twinkled with amusement when Mary, in her strained and quivering voice, began, but her jaw dropped at those last words; Mary was capable of carrying her off at a day's notice! She fairly trembled with distressed reassurances —but Captain Price continued to call.

And that was how it came about that this devoted daughter, after days of exasperation and nights of anxiety, reached a point of tense determination: She would go and see the man's son, and say. . . . That afternoon, as she stood before the swinging glass on her high bureau, tying her bonnet-strings, she tried to think what she would say. She hoped God would give her words—polite words; "for I *must* be polite," she reminded herself desperately. When she started across the street her Paisley shawl had slipped from one shoulder, so that the point dragged on the flagstones; she had split her right glove up the back, and her bonnet was jolted over sidewise; but the thick Chantilly veil hid the quiver of her chin.

Gussie met her with effusion, and Mary, striving to be polite, smiled painfully, and said:

"I don't want to see you; I want to see your husband."

Gussie tossed her head; but she made haste to call Cyrus, who came shambling along the hall from the cabin. The parlor was dark, for though it was a day of sunshine and merry May

wind, Gussie kept the shutters bowed—but Cyrus could see the pale intensity of his visitor's face. There was a moment's silence, broken by a distant harmonicon.

"Mr. Price," said Mary North, with pale, courageous lips, "you must stop your father."

Cyrus opened his weak mouth to ask an explanation, but Gussie rushed in.

"You are quite right, ma'am. Cyrus worries so about it (of course we know what you refer to). And Cyrus says it ought to be checked immediately, to save the old gentleman!"

"You must stop him," said Mary North, "for my mother's sake."

"Well—" Cyrus began.

"Have you cautioned your mother?" Gussie demanded.

"Yes," Miss North said, briefly. To talk to this woman of her mother made her wince, but it had to be done. "Will you speak to your father, Mr. Price?"

"Well, I—"

"Of course he will!" Gussie broke in; "Cyrus, he is in the cabin now."

"Well, to-morrow I—" Cyrus got up and sidled towards the door. "Anyhow, I don't believe he's thinking of such a thing."

"Miss North," said Gussie, rising, "*I* will do it."

"What, *now?*" faltered Mary North.

"Now," said Mrs. Cyrus, firmly.

"Oh," said Miss North, "I—I think I will go home. Gentlemen, when they are crossed, speak so—so earnestly."

Gussie nodded. The joy of action and of combat entered suddenly into her little soul; she never looked less vulgar than at that moment. Cyrus had disappeared.

Mary North, white and trembling, hurried out. A wheezing strain from the harmonicon followed her into the May sunshine, then ended, abruptly —Mrs. Price had begun! On her own door-step Miss North stopped and listened, holding her breath for an outburst. . . . It came: a roar of laughter. Then silence. Mary North stood, motionless, in her own parlor; her shawl, hanging from one elbow, trailed behind her; her other glove had split; her bonnet was blown back and over one ear; her heart was pounding in her throat. She was perfectly aware that she had done an unheard-of thing. "But," she said, aloud, "I'd do it again. I'd do anything to protect her. But I hope I was polite?" Then she thought how courageous Mrs. Cyrus was. "She's as brave as a lion!" said Mary North. Yet, had Miss North been able to stand at the Captain's door, she would have witnessed cowardice. . . .

"Gussie, I wouldn't cry. Confound that female, coming over and stirring you up! Now don't, Gussie! Why, I never thought of— Gussie, I wouldn't cry—"

"I have worried almost to death. Pro-promise!"

"Oh, your granny was Mur— Gussie, my dear, now *don't.*"

"Dr. Lavendar said you'd always been so sensible; he said he didn't see how you could think of such a dreadful thing."

"What! Lavendar? I'll thank Lavendar to mind his own business!" Captain Price forgot Gussie; he spoke "earnestly." "Dog-gone these people that pry into— Oh, now, Gussie, *don't!*"

"I've worried so awfully," said Mrs. Cyrus. "Everybody is talking about you. And Dr. Lavendar is so—so angry about it; and now the daughter has charged on me as though it is my fault! Of course, she is queer, but—"

"Queer? she's queer as Dick's hat-band! Why do you listen to her? Gussie, such an idea never entered my head—or Mrs. North's either."

"Oh yes, it has! Her daughter said that she had had to speak to her—"

Captain Price, dumfounded, forgot his fear and burst out: "You're a pack of fools, the whole caboodle! I swear I—"

"Oh, don't blaspheme!" said Gussie, faintly, and staggered a little, so that all the Captain's terror returned. *If she fainted!*

"Hi, there, Cyrus! Come aft, will you? Gussie's getting white around the gills—Cyrus!"

Cyrus came, running, and between them they got the swooning Gussie to her room. Afterwards,

when Cyrus tiptoed down-stairs, he found the Captain at the cabin door. The old man beckoned mysteriously.

"Cy, my boy, come in here"—he hunted about in his pocket for the key of the cupboard—"Cyrus, I'll tell you just what happened: that female across the street came in, and told poor Gussie some cock-and-bull story about her mother and me!" The Captain chuckled, and picked up his harmonicon. "It scared the life out of Gussie," he said; then, with sudden angry gravity, —"these people that poke their noses into other people's business ought to be thrashed. Well, I'm going over to see Mrs. North." And off he stumped, leaving Cyrus staring after him, open-mouthed.

If Mary North had been at home, she would have met him with all the agonized courage of shyness and a good conscience. But she had fled out of the house and down along the River Road, to be alone and regain her self-control.

The Captain, however, was not seeking Miss North. He opened the front door, and advancing to the foot of the stairs, called up: "Ahoy, there! Mrs. North!"

Mrs. North came trotting out to answer the summons. "Why, Alfred!" she exclaimed, looking over the banisters, "when did you come in? I didn't hear the bell ring. I'll come right down."

"It didn't ring; I walked in," said the Captain. And Mrs. North came down-stairs, perhaps a little stiffly, but as pretty an old lady as you ever saw. Her white curls lay against faintly pink cheeks, and her lace cap had a pink bow on it. But she looked anxious and uncomfortable.

("Oh," she was saying to herself, "I do hope Mary's out!)—Well, Alfred?" she said; but her voice was frightened.

The Captain stumped along in front of her into the parlor, and motioned her to a seat. "Mrs. North," he said, his face red, his eye hard, "some jack-donkeys (of course they're females) have been poking their noses into our affairs; and—"

"Oh, Alfred, isn't it horrid in them?"

"Darn 'em!" said the Captain.

"It makes me mad!" cried Mrs. North; then her spirit wavered. "Mary is so foolish; she says she'll—she'll take me away from Old Chester. I laughed at first, it was so foolish. But when she said that—oh *dear!*"

"But my dear madam, say you won't go! Ain't you skipper?"

"No, I'm not," she said, dolefully. "Mary brought me here, and she'll take me away, if she thinks it best. Best for *me*, you know. Mary is a good daughter, Alfred. I don't want you to think she isn't. But she's foolish. Unmarried women are apt to be foolish."

The Captain thought of Gussie and sighed. "Well," he said, with the simple candor of the sea, "I guess there ain't much difference in 'em, married or unmarried."

"It's the interference makes me mad," Mrs. North declared, hotly.

"Damn the whole crew!" said the Captain; and the old lady laughed delightedly.

"Thank you, Alfred!"

"My daughter-in-law is crying her eyes out," the Captain sighed.

"Tck!" said Mrs. North; "Alfred, you have no sense. Let her cry. It's good for her!"

"Oh no," said the Captain, shocked.

"You're a perfect slave to her," said Mrs. North.

"No more than you are to your daughter," Captain Price defended himself: and Mrs. North sighed.

"We are just real foolish, Alfred, to listen to 'em. As if we didn't know what was good for us."

"People have interfered with us a good deal, first and last," the Captain said, grimly.

The faint color in Mrs. North's cheeks suddenly deepened. "So they have."

The Captain shook his head in a discouraged way; he took his pipe out of his pocket and looked at it absent-mindedly. "I suppose I can stay at home, and let 'em get over it?"

"Stay at home? Why, you'd far better—"

"What?" said the Captain.

"Come oftener! Let 'em get over it by getting used to it."

Captain Price looked doubtful. "But how about your daughter?"

Mrs. North quailed. "I forgot Mary," she admitted.

"I don't bother you, coming to see you, do I?" the Captain said, anxiously.

"Why, Alfred, I love to see you,—if our children would just let us alone!"

"First it was our parents," said Captain Price. He frowned heavily. "According to other people, first we were too young to have sense; and now we're too old." He took out his worn tobacco-pouch, plugged some shag into his pipe, and struck a match under the mantelpiece. He sighed with deep discouragement.

Mrs. North sighed too. Neither of them spoke for a moment; then the little old lady drew a quick breath and flashed a look at him; opened her lips; closed them with a snap; then regarded the toe of her slipper fixedly. The color flooded up to her soft white hair.

The Captain, staring hopelessly, suddenly blinked; then his honest red face broadened into beaming astonishment and satisfaction. "*Mrs. North—?*"

"Captain Price!" she parried, breathlessly.

"So long as our affectionate children have suggested it!"

"Suggested—what?"

"Let's give 'em something to cry about!"

"Alfred!"

"Look here: we are two old fools; so they say, anyway. Let's live up to their opinion! I'll get a house for Cyrus and Gussie—and your girl can live with 'em, if she wants to." The Captain's bitterness showed then. "What do you say?"

Mrs. North laughed excitedly, and shook her head; the tears stood in her eyes.

"Do you want to leave Old Chester?" the Captain demanded.

"You know I don't," she said, sighing.

"She'd take you away to-morrow," he threatened, "if she knew I had—had—"

"She sha'n't know it."

"Well, then, we've got to get spliced to-morrow."

"Oh, Alfred, no! I don't believe Dr. Lavendar would—"

"I'll have no dealings with Lavendar," the Captain said, with sudden stiffness; "he's like all the rest of 'em. I'll get a license in Upper Chester, and we'll go to some parson there."

Mrs. North's eyes snapped. "Oh, no, no!" she protested; but in another minute they were shaking hands on it.

"Cyrus and Gussie can go and live by themselves," said the Captain, joyously, "and I'll get that hold cleaned out; she's kept the ports shut ever since she married Cyrus."

"And I'll make a cake! And I'll take care of your clothes; you really are dreadfully shabby"; she turned him round to the light and brushed off some ashes. The Captain beamed. "Poor Alfred! and there's a button gone! that daughter-in-law of yours can't sew any more than a cat (and she *is* a cat). But I love to mend. Mary has saved me all that. She's such a good daughter — poor Mary. But she's unmarried, poor child."

However, it was not to-morrow. It was two or three days later that Dr. Lavendar and Danny, jogging along behind Goliath under the buttonwoods on the road to Upper Chester, were somewhat inconvenienced by the dust of a buggy that crawled up and down the hills just a little ahead. The hood of this buggy was up, upon which fact —it being a May morning of rollicking wind and sunshine—Dr. Lavendar speculated to his companion: "Daniel, the man in that vehicle is either blind and deaf, or else he has something on his conscience; in either case he won't mind our dust, so we'll cut in ahead at the watering-trough. G'on, Goliath!"

But Goliath had views of his own about the watering-trough, and instead of passing the hooded buggy, which had stopped there, he insisted upon drawing up beside it. "Now, look here," Dr. Lavendar remonstrated, "you know you're not thirsty." But Goliath plunged his nose down into

the cool depths of the great iron caldron, into which, from a hollow log, ran a musical drip of water. Dr. Lavendar and Danny, awaiting his pleasure, could hear a murmur of voices from the depths of the eccentric vehicle which put up a hood on such a day; when suddenly Dr. Lavendar's eye fell on the hind legs of the other horse. "That's Cipher's trotter," he said to himself, and leaning out, cried: "Hi! Cy?" At which the other horse was drawn in with a jerk, and Captain Price's agitated face peered out from under the hood.

"Where! Where's Cyrus?" Then he caught sight of Dr. Lavendar. "'*The devil and Tom Walker!*'" said the Captain, with a groan. The buggy backed erratically.

"Look out!" said Dr. Lavendar—but the wheels locked.

Of course there was nothing for Dr. Lavendar to do but get out and take Goliath by the head, grumbling, as he did so, that the Captain "shouldn't drive such a spirited beast."

"I am somewhat hurried," said Captain Price, stiffly.

The old minister looked at him over his spectacles; then he glanced at the small, embarrassed figure shrinking into the depths of the buggy.

("Hullo, hullo, hullo!" he said, softly. "Well, Gussie's done it!) You'd better back a little, Captain," he advised.

"I can manage."

"I didn't say 'go back,'" Dr. Lavendar said, mildly.

"Oh!" murmured a small voice from within the buggy.

"I expect you need me, don't you, Alfred?" said Dr. Lavendar.

"What?" said the Captain, frowning.

"If I can be of any service to you and Mrs. North," said Dr. Lavendar, "I shall be very glad."

Captain Price looked at him. "Now, look here, Lavendar, we're going to do it *this* time, if all the parsons in—hell, try to stop us!"

"I'm not going to try to stop you."

"But Gussie said you said—"

"Alfred, at your time of life, are you beginning to quote Gussie?"

"But she said you said it would be—"

"Captain Price, I do not express my opinion of your conduct to your daughter-in-law. You ought to have sense enough to know that."

"Well, why did you talk to her about it?"

"I didn't talk to her about it. But," said Dr. Lavendar, thrusting out his lower lip, "I should like to!"

"We were going to hunt up a parson in Upper Chester," said the Captain, sheepishly.

Dr. Lavendar looked about, up and down the silent, shady road, then through the bordering elderberries into an orchard. "If you have your license," he said, "I have my prayer-book. Let's go into the orchard. There are two men working

there we can get for witnesses—Danny isn't quite enough, I suppose."

The Captain turned to Mrs. North. "What do you say, ma'am?" he said. She nodded, and gathered up her skirts to get out of the buggy. The two old men led their horses to the side of the road and hitched them to the rail fence; then the Captain helped Mrs. North through the elder-bushes, and shouted out to the men plowing at the other side of the orchard. They came—big, kindly young fellows, and stood gaping at the three old people standing under the apple-tree in the sunshine. Dr. Lavendar explained that they were to be witnesses, and the boys took off their hats.

There was a little silence, and then, in the white shadows and perfume of the orchard, with its sunshine, and drift of petals falling in the gay wind, Dr. Lavendar began. . . . When he came to "Let no man put asunder—" Captain Price growled in his grizzled red beard, "Nor woman, either!" But only Mrs. North smiled.

When it was over, Captain Price drew a deep breath of relief. "Well, this time we made a sure thing of it, Mrs. North!"

"*Mrs. North?*" said Dr. Lavendar, and chuckled.

"Oh—" said Captain Price, and roared at the joke.

"You'll have to call me Letty," said the pretty old lady, smiling and blushing.

"Oh," said the Captain; then he hesitated.

"Well, now, if you don't mind, I—I guess I won't call you Letty. I'll call you Letitia."

"Call me anything you want to," said Mrs. Price, gayly.

Then they all shook hands with one another and with the witnesses, who found something left in their palms that gave them great satisfaction, and went back to climb into their respective buggies.

"We have shore leave," the Captain explained; "we won't go back to Old Chester for a few days. You may tell 'em, Lavendar!"

"Oh, may I?" said Dr. Lavendar, blankly. "Well, good-by, and good luck!"

He watched the other buggy tug on ahead, and then he leaned down to catch Danny by the scruff of the neck.

"Well, Daniel," he said, "'*if at first you don't succeed*'—"

And Danny was pulled into the buggy.

THE THIRD VOLUME

THE THIRD VOLUME

I

"YOU could write my life in two volumes," Mr. Peter Walton used to say, in his loud, good-humored voice: "Vol. I.: All Peter. Vol. II.: Eunice and some Peter."

"The first volume would be short," his brother Paul observed; and Peter agreed that it would not only be short—he was twenty-four when he and Eunice were married, and they were well along in the fifties now,—but worthless.

"The second volume," he said, modestly, "has some respectable things in it, but Eunice is the author of 'em."

There were many respectable things in it; enough to make all but the very good people of Old Chester forget the contents of Volume I. Those who were not very good, like William King, or who had defective memories, like Dr. Lavendar, were heartily fond of the lovable, powerful, opinionated man.

But long after the new leaf had been turned over, and his wife had begun to write the second

volume, the good people continued to have him on their minds. For one thing, he sometimes drank too much; and then as Good People like to remember (at the Throne of Grace, if nowhere else), the things that Bad People would like to forget—there was that old friendship with Miss Betsey Darling. (Miss Darling's name was never mentioned before the chaste ears of Old Chester ladies, yet, somehow, it was the ladies who prayed for Mr. Walton!)

Briefly, the Peter Walton of the second volume was an honest and able gentleman, who represented us in Congress, went regularly to church, and supposed that religion meant the contribution-box and the privilege of keeping Dr. Lavendar supplied with extremely good tobacco. Also, he was of that pleasant temperament which believes whatever it is comfortable to believe; he was always able to explain facts to suit his mental necessities.

His brother Paul, a little, spectacled man, whose mild eyes never blinked the truth, whether it was pleasant or unpleasant,—was nearly fifteen years his senior. Paul was, in Old Chester's opinion, entirely ineffective. Once he did effect something, but only two or three people knew it, and to them the thing he effected was accidental; it was, Jim Williams said, as if a child had stopped a locomotive by rolling a rock on to the track.

"But he did stop the locomotive," Dr. King reminded him.

"Happened to," Mr. Williams said, laconically.

The "locomotive" was Peter's affair with the lady whose name was only mentioned at the Throne of Grace. It was when Peter was about twenty-two that he made an ass of himself (to put it mildly); at any rate, Old Chester really had cause to be shocked, and as for Mr. Paul Walton's feelings—

The story ran that Peter kicked the door of his brother's room open at four o'clock in the morning, and rushed in, blazing with anger.

"Look here!" he said; "somebody, I don't know who—some damned old-maid skunk, I suppose; has seen—seen fit—" he trembled so with rage that he stammered; "to take it upon himself to interfere between me and a—a friend of mine; and she—she—"

Paul, lying in the big four-poster that looked like a raft with a mahogany obelisk at each corner, woke with a start, and sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"She's going away; she wouldn't see me"—Peter raved on; he was frantic with pain. "She wouldn't *see* me, I tell you! She sent down word she was going away. I've been under her window all night, and she wouldn't speak. I—" a sob swelled in his young throat—"I'll kill the damned coward who put her against me; I'll—"

Paul nodded gravely; "Then she *is* honest," he said; "I thought she was. Poor creature!"

"If I find out who set her against me," the

younger brother stormed, shaking his fists above his head, "I'll kill him!"

"I paid her to get out of town," Paul said, mildly.

The next few minutes were unprintable. What Peter said, and then what he did, left a scar of remorse on his own mind which no later contrition could remove. For after a while, in spite of the agony of loss—to a boy of twenty-two it was agony—and the excruciating humiliation of being protected by another man—Peter was contrite, and said so. A year or two later, when he met Eunice Haydon, he even had a sort of gratitude to his brother, who had "accidentally" stopped the locomotive.

He grinned over it to himself, and wondered how Paul had the courage—"for I'm not pretty when I'm mad," he reflected, candidly. "But old Paul, sitting up there in bed, rubbing his eyes like a baby, was as plucky as a game cock!" Yet neither Peter, nor Jim Williams, nor the doctor credited Paul's conduct to intelligence. "He just took it into his head," Peter told himself.

The fact was, Peter's large and buoyant personality so swamped Paul that no one really knew him. He was supposed to be timid, because he never contradicted anybody, and opinionless, because he never dogmatized. He just pottered about in the Thomas Walton's Sons' warehouse, losing money on scrupulosities of truth-telling

which discouraged buyers, and too busy, he said, even to read the newspaper.

"If Paul," the younger brother used to bawl out, "had tar on the seat of his breeches, and sat down in a bushel of doubloons, not one of 'em would stick to him!"

Many doubloons, so to speak, had in course of time stuck to Peter—"and Paul and I go halves on everything," Peter said, simply.

The two brothers were alike only in their unshakable integrity and, of course, in their belief that there was no place on earth that compared to Old Chester as a place of residence. (It is only fair to say they were right about that; anybody who has lived there will tell you the same thing.) In fact, the Walton brothers were just like everybody else in town—good *and* bad.

But Peter's wife, the Eunice of Volume II., was not like Old Chester, because she was only good. To begin with, she was a Quakeress—one of the Brighton Haydons, who had a pedigree of saintliness reaching back to English scourgings and buffetings. Perhaps it was the blood of the martyrs in her which made her marry Peter; but whatever it was, she listened to the remonstrances of the whole Haydon connection, then calmly accepted the godly ostracism of Brighton, and married her worldling. Even her lover was awed by her serene indifference to family displeasure.

"If she had taken old Paulus" he said, "I

could understand it; for one thing, his clothes are always in order, whereas I look like a rag-and-bottle man."

This was a week before the wedding; it was after dinner, and the table had been cleared. Peter and Jim Williams were playing poker, while Dr. King and Paul Walton looked on.

"Confound you both!" Peter had complained; "this two-handed business is 'pap.'"

The onlookers had refused Peter's invitation to take a hand; William (a newly married man then), because his Martha disapproved of poker, and Paul because he didn't care to lie, even in a game—"anyway, you haven't the brains for it, my good fellow," Peter said, frankly.

"It may be 'pap,'" said Jim, "but—" and he very successfully called his opponent's bluff; a moment later he began to count his winnings on penny stakes. Peter, in his shirt-sleeves, put his feet on the table and ate a peach. A fruit-dish on the sideboard had invited wasps from a garden drowsing in the September sunshine, but the heel-taps in the glasses had become more attractive to them than the fruit. Peter, brushing one of the intruders away with an impatient hand, threw his peach-stone at his brother.

"Old Paul," he said, "isn't such an awful contrast to those holy Haydons; but *me!*"

"You are wrong, my dear Peter," Paul objected, politely; "Miss Haydon never would have honored me with her regard."

"Mrs. Drayton is so doubtful about Miss Haydon's future happiness, that she says she is going to remember her in her prayers," said the doctor.

"Hate to have old Hellpestle tax her memory," said Peter.

"I'll trouble you for two dollars and forty-two cents, Pete," said Jim Williams.

"It's the contrast that caught her," the doctor said.

Peter took his feet off the table. (The two brothers lived by themselves, unhampered by feminine refinements; still, it was only Peter who put his feet on the dinner-table—"and *you'll* stop it in eight days!" said William King.)

Paul, in tight pantaloons and perfectly fitting coat, stood with an elbow on the mantelpiece, regarding the other three through mildly gleaming spectacles.

"That's a good idea of William's," he ventured to say; "it is doubtless because you are unlike the young lady that you have won her affections." (Mr. Paul Walton's decorum of dress, manners, and language was held up to Old Chester boys by every maiden aunt in town.)

Peter, who had brought his chair down on all four legs, sat up very straight, and fumbled in his pocket for Jim's two dollars and forty-two cents.

"Take it, dog-gone you!" he said, amiably. "There's something in that idea of contrast,

Sawbones," he ruminated; "yes; that may be it. (Darn these wasps!) I've sometimes thought the Creator must find Lucifer more entertaining than Gabriel."

"I don't call you Lucifer," Paul protested.

"Some do," Jim Williams said, dryly.

"I don't know that Miss Haydon's regard for you is any more remarkable than yours for her," Dr. King said.

"*That's* the worst thing that was ever said about me," Peter declared, placidly. . . . "Willy, I hear Alex Morgan is going to leave town; did you know it?"

"Good idea," said Paul.

"We can spare him," Jim Williams declared. "Peter, he calls you some pretty names."

"Well," Peter said, "I called him some. I threw the whole deck in his face, and said why."

"Queer," Dr. King commented; "I shouldn't have thought that even Alex Morgan would have sold his reputation for a jack-pot."

"His reputation was so small, a deuce in his sleeve could buy it," Peter explained.

"But to cheat!" Jim said; "I'd sooner cut a throat."

"Oh, yes," Peter agreed, carelessly; "a gentleman can cut a throat, but he can't cheat. As for Alex, he's a dead dog so far as this community is concerned, so the sooner he gets out of it the better. If he were my own brother, I'd put on

a pair of new boots and assist his departure! And I'd never speak to him again."

"You are a gentle, forgiving creature, Pete," the doctor said, admiringly.

"'*Ne obliviscaris*,'" Peter began; but at that moment a wasp, which had been hovering over a wine-glass, lit on his wrist, and instantly his stamping rage changed the subject.

"Suffering snakes! the thing bit me! Do something, Willy! Do something!"

"Spit on it," Jim Williams advised, riffling the cards lazily.

"Good idea," Paul said, his spectacles shining with sympathy.

"It 'll quiet down," the doctor told him; but Peter swore and roared, and told him he was a fool. "Can't you stop it? What's the use of being a sawbones? Paul, haven't you got something among your powders and perfumes? You ought to see Paul's bureau," he said, chuckling. "Look here, Willy, it hurts like the devil!"

"Peter can't stand discomfort for a minute," Paul remarked.

"*Discomfort!*" Peter said, sucking his wrist; "I wish he'd bit you in six places!"

"I would suggest—" Paul began, anxiously; but nobody listened to his suggestion.

"Pity your Quakeress can't see you now," Dr. King said, sardonically.

All the same, William thought that the Quakeress had done well for herself; he and the big,

violent, honest man had been friends ever since they were born, and his affection was not dependent upon Peter's manners or language. But William's wife had wondered at Miss Haydon's choice quite as much as did the humble and successful lover.

"Mr. Paul Walton would certainly be more suitable," she had told her husband when the engagement came out. "I very much fear Mr. Peter's language will shock a Quaker girl."

"He's going to speak Miss Haydon's language," William had retorted; "he's going to say 'thee' and 'thou.'"

Mrs. King sniffed: "There are other words than 'thee' and 'thou' in Peter Walton's vocabulary. Mrs. Drayton thinks it is somebody's duty to tell the girl, flatly and frankly, about his card-playing, and about—about That Person."

"Let me know when you do your duty, my dear. I'd like to be behind the door," said William.

So far, nobody had done his duty in regard to Miss Darling; but Willy King took the opportunity, while Peter was sucking his wrist, to report Mrs. Drayton's feeling about cards.

"Tell her I'm going to come down to backgammon," Peter mumbled. "Eunice says cards are the devil's hymn-book, but she won't mind backgammon."

"Is Miss Haydon under the impression that the devil has no interest in dice?" Jim asked, grinning.

"I told her I never had gambled at backgammon," Peter said, simply. "I told her backgammon wasn't like cards."

"Peter can make himself believe whatever he finds convenient," William King said, admiringly.

"Anyway, there'll be no stakes," Peter declared; "Eunice says gambling's wrong."

"She's going to make you walk straight, Peter!"

"I shall walk wherever she tells me," he said.

"How long do you give him to get over it, Willy?" Jim inquired.

Willy did not commit himself; he had "got over" it himself rather quickly; but what was the use of saying so? However, he and Jim reported to Old Chester that Peter had forsworn cards for the sake of his Quaker lady-love. When Mrs. Drayton heard that, she was greatly astonished; she said that perhaps, after all, her prayers had been answered!

"Apparently she hadn't overmuch faith in prayer," Peter said. This was on his wedding-day, and he was standing in front of Paul's looking-glass, swearing and perspiring over his white tie, while the doctor and Jim Williams offered him the assistance of their impudence.

"I would suggest that you turn the short end—" Paul began to instruct him; but no one listened.

"I understand Mrs. Drayton 'hopes' the marriage will turn out well," Willy King said.

"Well, so do I," said Peter. "Darn this tie! Suffering *snakes!*"

II

The marriage did turn out well—very well, although it was put to two pretty severe tests. The first was wealth: Eunice had money, so she and Peter did not have the mutual anxieties and interests of poverty to weld them together; the next was childlessness. With neither poverty nor children to make two, one, marriage easily lapses into the mere habit of living together, which at best is dull, and at worst is—well, call it "war."

The bride and groom settled down in the old Walton house. Of course Paul never dreamed of leaving them; for one thing, the place happened to be his, but nobody remembered that.

The house, with the white pillars of its portico rising above the second-story windows, stood close to the river, where the sleek gleam of water curving over the dam filled the air with soft, unending thunder. Yet it was a house of quietness. As soon as you entered it silence seemed to close about you. Excited men who came to talk politics with Peter instinctively lowered their voices, and once across his own threshold even Peter's resonant tones fell to Eunice's calm key.

Children would have broken the quietness—"but *I'm* satisfied!" Peter would say. And no

doubt he believed that he was; it was pleasanter to believe that than to sigh for an heir. "I wouldn't want a lot of brats, with their measles and their mumps, bawling about, and taking thy attention from me!" he used to announce, loudly.

What Eunice wanted, she did not say, and he did not see how her "attention" to him betrayed the desire of her empty arms.

Most childless wives who love their husbands are maternal in their care of them. Eunice ordered Peter's clothes, and tried patiently to keep him tidy; she reminded him of his engagements and saw that he did not spend too much money. Before making a public address, he used to "speak his piece" to her, and she coached him, as no doubt his mother, when he was twelve years old, had coached his

On Linden, when the sun was low.

And she told him what he must eat—and what he must not drink. (Alas, how many mothers try to do that!)

She reproved him when he did wrong, but she never talked religion to him; she merely took him to church, and tried to keep him awake during the sermon.

"I didn't know *that*," he used to say, when some theological statement happened to catch his ear; "do we believe that, Eunice?"

"Yes," she would instruct him.

"Oh, you don't say so! Well, all right; then

it's so," he would say, cheerfully. But he never came nearer to the things of the Spirit than such artless acceptance of this or that article of faith to which Dr. Lavendar might refer and which Eunice might indorse. Only once was he known to have instructed her. He had spoken violently of that old scandal about Alex Morgan, and she had rebuked him:

"A mere game is not worthy of such words, Peter."

Then he did speak up. "Thee's always right in everything—except this. This, thee doesn't understand. A lady can't, I suppose. It isn't a matter of a game; it is a matter of honor. Alex is damned."

"Then he needs thy forgiveness."

"Eunice," he said, quietly, "God and a lady may forgive cheating, but I don't." He accepted with secret amusement this innocent ignorance of "honor." It was characteristic of him that he explained it to himself in a way that made what would have been a defect in any one else redound to her credit. "She is so perfect, she can't even recognize imperfection when she sees it!" But in all lesser matters than "honor," in religion, or clothes or manners, he accepted her guidance implicitly, and believed whatever she told him.

It was the mother in her that cared for the lesser matters, but it was the wife who helped him fight with the beasts at Ephesus; when the beasts were vanquished, the wife exulted; when

they won, the mother forgave. . . . He never went near Betsey Darling's end of the town (Betsey had drifted back to Old Chester); gambling, of course, had ceased with his marriage; and certainly he never swore—in Eunice's presence. But conviviality remained the weak place in his armor.

Paul used to put him to bed when he was "overcome" (that was the way Paul expressed it); and the next morning he would come down-stairs, sheepish and ashamed, to look for Eunice. Sometimes he found her awaiting him in the parlor, where on the ceiling the reflection of the water slipping smoothly over the dam played back and forth, back and forth, like unheard music. His apologies were listened to in grave silence.

"A beast would not treat thee as I do," he would protest; "why can't I remember that? Why am I lower than a beast?"

"Because," she explained once, "thee forgets that thee is only a little lower than the angels."

Instantly Peter's remorse changed to embarrassment; he could have borne reproaches, but the slightest reference to things of the soul closed his lips. "I'll take only one glass after this," he told her, shortly. He knew what he was: a poor devil, not worthy to unloose the latchet of her shoes! But at least he was no hypocrite: he would *not* talk religion!

After such a scene as this there would be weeks of only one glass. Once, after many glasses, he came home at dawn and knelt at her chaste knee,

weeping like a bad child. (It never occurred to him to conceal anything from her. "I would as soon try to have a secret from the Creator," he told himself.) His confession did not shake her love. Again her silence, her cool hands on his hot face, her calm eyes plumbing his shame and grossness with patience and pity—and forgiveness!

"How can thee forgive this? I never forgive anything, yet I am a sinner!" He looked at her in amazement. "Thee doesn't seem to feel that I've injured thee!" he said with awe; for he never recognized the mother in her, the mother, who can forgive always! To him this exquisite woman was all wife—and the wife forgives only sometimes.

"How can I stop to feel that thee injures me? Thee has injured thyself," she grieved over him, pressing his shamed face against her breast; "it is that which pierces my heart."

He never doubted the miracle of her forgiveness for anything he might do, and alas! he—but we need not go into that. "If she forgives him, whose business is it?" said Willy King. The doctor knew the quality of Eunice's forgiveness; for the time came when he saw poor Betsey Darling go down into the shadows, clinging to that quiet hand—clinging to it even when the cold waters of the River rose about her shrinking feet.

"She can forgive earth its earthiness," Peter said, when his old friend told him of that solemn hour; "the body doesn't count much with Eunice. William, I'm not worthy of her!"

"Why, of course you're not!" the doctor agreed; "has that just struck you?"

"If I get to heaven, it will be by holding on to her petticoats," Peter said.

He had to hold very tightly to those Quaker petticoats when the war broke out. He was a raving, stamping Union man—yet he did not enlist! It was the wife, rather than the mother, who knew what this cost him. Neither did Paul enlist, though he tried to by leaving off his glasses when he went to the recruiting-office. "But he couldn't tell herring from cheese without spectacles," Peter said, with good-humored contempt.

"Paul isn't big enough for a target," he told William King once, "but he's brave—what there is of him; I've seen him face the guns! *You* know? Poor old Betsey!"

Peter, for Eunice's conscience' sake, was brave enough to stay at home—and people whose memories go back to the sixties will know what courage it took to do that! Instead of enlisting, he ran again for Congress, and sat doggedly at his desk with his hands itching to hold a gun. There was a story of his being twitted upon preserving a whole skin when other men stood up to be shot at. . . .

"I know you help darkies across the border," a man flung at him once over the dinner-table in the old Riggs House in Washington; "but I should think a man of your heft might strike a blow for the flag!"

Peter Walton reddened to his ears, and his fingers tightened on his tumbler of whisky; but he spoke very quietly: "Sir, in deference to the principles of a lady, I serve my country with my head instead of my hands."

A man on the other side of the table sneered: "One of these sentimental Yankee females, I suppose, who like to fuss over a big nig—" His teeth bit off the rest of the sentence. Walton had flung the whisky into his face, and followed it in a sliding jump across the table, table-cloth, dishes, bottles, crumpling and flying before his feet! He had his hand on the man's throat before the startled company knew just what had happened. As, swearing and stuttering, he was pulled away from his prey he stammered out:

"I don't fight—I'm a Quaker! Let me get hold of him—I'll teach him to speak of a white woman in the same breath with— I don't fight! I'm a Quaker!"

III

The second volume of Peter's biography was full of the happiness of monotony. Nothing happened but peace. The war was over, and life in the Waltons' silent house, that thrilled faintly to the jarring tumble of the water breaking into foam below the dam, was as serene as the soul of the saintly woman who was Peter's wife. He was beaten at the polls in the early seventies, and went back to the warehouse, where Paul, too busy

to read the newspapers, had been losing money for the last eight or ten years.

When Peter burst in again, his little old brother blew about before him like a dead leaf. Peter would not have slighted Paul for the world, but the sheer pressure of his arrogant energy shouldered the senior partner to the wall and turned the tide of failure. The brothers used to go to the warehouse together every morning, but now Paul read the paper. Peter wrote the letters, and bawled the orders, and roared and raged when people were slow in carrying them out.

In the evening they rode home together again, —but as soon as they entered the house, Peter knew his place.

"I always expect to hear Eunice say 'Down charge!' to you, Pete," Dr. King used to declare, chuckling. Certainly the loud voice fell to match the "thee" and "thou" of his address. In the evening the brothers played backgammon until they both almost went to sleep. . . .

So, tranquilly, one by one, the leaves of the second volume were turned. The years passed, and the husband and wife drew nearer the end of the book. Apparently they never thought of "Finis." At least Peter never thought of it. Once, when he built a greenhouse for Eunice, taking infinite pains in regard to its position—"it must be so I can put an extension to it when she wants a bigger place for her flowers," he said;—Mrs. Walton smiled.

"To hear Peter talk, thee'd think I was going to live for ever," she told her brother-in-law.

"I'll be satisfied if thee lives as long as I do," Peter said.

A shadow fell across her face, and she sighed. It was after dinner, on Sunday, and the three Waltons were sitting down-stairs in the wide hall, that was darkened by the great portico which roofed the second-story windows. Summer blazed up to the cool thresholds of the open doors at each end of the hall. The curving gleam of water on the edge of the dam flashed sometimes through the blossoming locust-trees in front of the house; at the back, was the green tunnel of the grape-arbor, its mossy flagstones checkered with sunshine; then blue sky and white clouds and a clover-field murmurous with bees.

Peter, his coat off, his collar open at the throat, a silver tumbler of sangaree beside him, fanned himself violently, mopped his forehead, and vociferated at the weather. Paul's frock-coat was decorously buttoned over a puce-colored waistcoat, but even his sense of propriety could not protect his wilting collar. Eunice, in a lavender cross-barred muslin with tight sleeves down to her delicate wrists, a white kerchief over her shoulders, sat with her hands folded in her lap, enduring the discomfort with entire patience.

"Suffering snakes! how hot it is!" said Peter; "if thee wasn't here, Eunice, I would be more

specific. Paul, get the backgammon-board! I've got to do something, or I'll burst!"

"Good idea," said Paul; he brought the old red board marked "History of England," and for half an hour his stupid moves gave his brother the chance to let off steam. Suddenly Peter shut the board with a slam that scared the swallows, twittering on the rafters of the porch roof.

"Good Lord, Paul! Why did you move that column on your double trays? I could whip you with my eyes shut, my boy."

"So you could," Paul agreed, mildly. "Eunice, I would suggest a fan. No? Well, I'm going to have a look at the horses." He got up and sauntered off to the stable, and Peter, with nothing to do, sat still, fanning and perspiring.

"Paul is a good fellow," he told his wife; "and he has a lot of spunk—*thee* remembers? But it's a pity the Lord didn't give him brains. Eunice! It gets hotter every minute. Doesn't thee feel it?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't thee want a fan?"

"No."

"Suppose I fan thee?"

"If thee pleases."

With a good deal of puffing he edged his chair closer to hers and began to saw the air with great energy. Eunice smiled at him.

"Thee takes good care of me," she said. Then abruptly, she put her hands over her face, and cried out, in a sort of wail: "Oh, if God had but

given us children!" Peter's fan paused in mid-air; he stared at her, his lips falling apart with astonishment. "Thee would have had some one to care for thee when I am gone," she said, in a whisper.

The poignancy of such a cry from such serene lips was almost terrifying.

"What on earth is thee—is thee talking about!" Peter stammered.

But the gust of passion was gone; the fear—if it was a fear—calmed into her usual calm speech. "Thee knows one or the other of us must go first. I hope it may be thee. If it is I, I hope thee will marry again."

"Eunice! Stop! I don't like—that sort of talk. Besides, we shall both live for years. You're only fifty-five. And—and I won't let you go." In his panic he lapsed back to the speech natural to him. "If you do," he said, loudly, "by God, I'll follow you!"

She laid a quiet hand on his. "Peter, we each must go in the path ordained for us from the beginning. Be still."

And immediately the winds and the waves of that violent and loving heart obeyed her. He was still. But that night he hardly slept. Somehow, it was not as easy as usual to adjust the facts of life to that blindness to the future which was necessary to his peace of mind. Yet the habit of years helped him to do it, and by the next morning he was full of plans for her pleasure that

challenged Time! She must have this, she must have that; a new porch at the back of the house; a bigger garden. "I wish thee wore jewelry," he said, wistfully,—which made her smile.

But she did not speak to him again of the Inexorable Day, and Peter having made himself believe what was necessary to his comfort, was confident that her reference to it was only a passing mood. "She was morbid," he said; "she has forgotten it by this time. As for me, I never think of such things! It's foolish."

So he went on making plans that defied the future; he set out a row of arbor-vitæs on the north side of the garden. "In twenty years they'll make a splendid windbreak for thee," he said. And again the shadow fell across her face. It was always a peaceful face. Once or twice, lately, it seemed as if she tried to speak to him of something under the peace, but he shied away from any approach to things below the surface, telling himself that he did not know at what she hinted.

Then the blow fell. . . . It was only a few weeks later, on a serene July morning, that she was taken ill. It was very sharp, very terrifying, very short. Then, while they watched her, scarcely daring to breathe, the flame of Life, fluttering and blowing, rose again, and burned steadily in her quiet eyes.

"She is out of danger," William King said, when he left her room and went down-stairs into the dining-room with Peter, who was still shak-

ing so that he could hardly hold the decanter steady enough to give the doctor a glass of wine. "It's her heart," Willy said; "I've been afraid of it for some time." His face was wrung with fatigue and pity.

"But she's out of danger? You said she was out of danger!"

"Yes; at this moment."

"She—she won't ever have another attack?"

"I hope not; but, of course—"

"You don't think she will?" the terrified husband entreated.

"She may not," William said, reassuringly.

"You think she won't?" Peter gasped.

"Well, we'll do all we can to prevent it," the doctor said; his voice was professionally cheerful.

"Then you are not anxious about her—thank God!" Peter said. He drew a long breath of relief, and the water stood in his eyes. "William, I felt the life run out of me this morning before you came! It seemed to go out of my knees."

His friend nodded. "I was scared myself."

"But you're not scared now?" Peter said, following him down to the gate, where the doctor's mare had been stamping and switching at the flies for the last two hours. "You just said you weren't anxious," he insisted, fiercely; "you said she wasn't in any danger now!" He had begun to tremble again.

"Why, I wouldn't go away if she were in danger, now," Willy said, honestly enough, and

climbed into his muddy old buggy. "But I don't like it, Jinny," he told his mare, as they jogged along towards Old Chester; "I don't like it!"

Peter went back to the house exultantly. "William isn't in the least anxious about her," he said, loudly. Paul, who was waiting for him in the hall, silently followed him to the sideboard in the dining-room. Peter's hand was still shaking so that the silver collar around the neck of the old cut-glass decanter clattered faintly.

"Peter," Paul said, his spectacles gleaming politely, "I would suggest that you refrain."

"God, man! I've got to have a drink. I'm shaken to pieces," Peter said. "It is all right now, but I thought—I thought I'd lost her."

"She is reposing at present?"

"Yes; oh yes; she is perfectly well now. And William says she'll never have another attack; but—" He stopped and drank some whisky, the tumbler, in his trembling hand, clicking against his teeth. Paul seemed about to speak, but closed his lips.

"You see," Peter burst out, "it came over me, all of a sudden, that there were so many things we hadn't talked about, she and I. I didn't know just how she felt about — about afterwards."

He spoke for the relief of speaking, not with any thought that Paul might reply.

"She'll go to heaven, if there is a heaven! But I—what about me? Maybe I couldn't find my

way in. It came over me, all of a sudden, that we'd never talked about—about that. She never told me just how things were. And I don't know. I always meant to ask her what I must believe, but—I couldn't. Couldn't speak of it, somehow. And now—*I don't know.*" His voice was broken with terror; he had apparently forgotten his brother's presence. "As soon as she gets well I'll ask her. . . . Not that there's any hurry—" he interrupted himself, "we're both going to live for years!"

He turned as if to pour out some more whisky, but Paul shoved the decanter away from him.

"I would suggest that you should go up-stairs and sit with her," he said.

"I'm just going. You tell those females in the kitchen to make a lot of jelly and beef tea and stuff for her."

Paul nodded. "Good idea."

"I tell you what," Peter said, with a long breath of relief, "that business this morning pretty well knocked me over—but William has no anxiety whatever," he added, quickly.

Paul winced. "He didn't say just that."

Peter looked at him angrily. "He did!" he said, and turned and went hurriedly up-stairs. His entrance into the quiet room was like a gust of fresh wind.

He found a maid with his wife, and banished her noisily. "I'll take care of Mrs. Walton! You go and make wine jelly for her!"

When the woman had gone he was full of the pathetic and useless services of an anxious man. Didn't Eunice want a hot brick at her feet? Did she feel a draught from the window? He was sure there was a draught! Why hadn't that fool girl shut the window? She looked a little warm; why hadn't Margaret had the sense to fan her? Where was there a fan? Well, this newspaper would do. Oughtn't she to have a drink of water? —or a glass of port?

She smiled, silently, watching him with tender eyes, and bearing with heavenly patience the crackling wave of the newspaper.

"William says thee'll never have another attack," he reassured her, boisterously; "but thee did give me a scare, Eunice!"

She smiled again, and tried to say (she was so very weak!) she "was . . . sorry."

"Oh, it's of no consequence; although just for a minute I was anxious. Unnecessarily so, of course. But, you see, the fact was—" he paused, his voice was suddenly anguished; "it came over me, Eunice, that I didn't just know, I hadn't thought to—to ask thee, what we believed about —I mean just what would happen, if—if anything happened to either of us." Abrupt tears fell down his face. "Thee never told me," he reproached her, with a sort of sob, "what I believed, or what I was to do, if . . . " he seemed like a frightened child; "Of course, it's all right now; William has no anxiety about thee! Only, for a minute, I—"

His breath caught in his throat and he hid his face in the newspaper; then he laughed; "I'm a fool!"

"Peter . . . Be still."

He swallowed hard, and began to wave the crumpled paper over her head. But he was still. Suddenly he said, "I'm going to put one of those new bay-windows on the parlor for thee, Eunice."

"Peter . . . Who will . . . take care of thee?"

It was only a whisper, so he could make himself believe that he had not heard it, and get up and bustle about, bursting into noisy abjurations of Margaret because there was no extra blanket on the foot of the bed. "Donkey! I'll go and get a comforter, and—"

"Too warm. . . . Don't."

So he sat down; then bent over and kissed the hand—that frail, maternal hand!—that lay so quietly on the sheet.

"Peter, listen. If . . . I go . . . I want thee . . . marry again."

Then he made no pretense. "Never! What, put any woman into your place? Never."

"Thee must. Thee must." Her eyes were full of despairing understanding of him; he flung his poor, pitiful truth back to them:

"I couldn't. I couldn't have a wife. . . . Besides—there are plenty of women. . . . But no wife! I won't marry; I *won't!* Don't ask me to, Eunice. Don't! I couldn't."

She turned her head away. "My poor Peter," she said.

Peter, slipping to his knees, hid his face in the bedclothes; she put her hand on his head, and stroked his hair. He heard her sigh. He set his teeth, wiped his eyes furtively on a corner of the sheet, and getting up, began to wave the newspaper vigorously. "Now stop talking," he said, with loud cheerfulness; "thee's perfectly well, so there's no use thinking about—things like that. Besides, thee ought to sleep. Thee mustn't talk. I'll talk to thee. Willy King says his strawberries are still bearing—"

"Go down and play backgammon with Paul," she said; "I'm quite comfortable."

Her voice was so much stronger that his heart bounded with joy. "We'll play up here, and then thee can speak if thee wants anything. Paul!" he shouted; "come up-stairs, and bring the backgammon-board. Eunice wants us to play up here." He left her—quivering a little from the jar of his voice—long enough to meet his brother at the head of the stairs, and whisper, loudly, "She won't know we're anxious if she sees us playing."

Then he went back and tucked the sheet tightly under her shoulders. "Go to sleep! Thee mustn't talk. Paul and I'll sit here and play."

She smiled, loosened the sheet furtively, and closed her eyes. Her husband and brother sat at the foot of the bed, whispering to each other now

and then, and throwing the dice into the palms of their hands so that the rattle should not disturb her.

The day was falling into the quiet afternoon. Outside Eunice's window, the locust-leaves moved a little, and some swallows, flying back and forth with mud for the nest they were building under the roof of the portico, perched on the scroll of a pillar and scolded each other; the muffled noises of the game rose, and fell, and rose again, but the ceaseless plunge and clamor of the water folded all the little noises into one pervasive sound, full, deep, rhythmical, an Earth lullaby for tired Life.

By and by Eunice sank into the harmony, and slept. Peter, tiptoeing clumsily over to look at her, saw the color flooding back into her face.

"We can go down-stairs," he whispered, loudly, to Paul; "she's perfectly well now. But I'll send one of the girls up to sit here."

IV

She slept most of the afternoon, and woke about five, so bright and strong that Peter forgot that he had ever been anxious.

"Come out on the porch and smoke," he told his brother; "Ellen and Margaret will sit with her for a while."

"Good idea," Paul murmured.

They put their chairs directly beneath Eunice's

windows; the swallows, building under the porch roof, were still now, and the noise of the dam was hushed, for the evening wind was carrying the sound of the falling waters to the other side of the river. It was so peaceful that they could hear the voices of the women in the room above them, and sometimes a little laugh—that fluttered laugh which means release from terror.

"Those girls adore her," Peter said.

"Everybody does," said Paul.

There was a long silence; then Peter drew a deep breath, and threw up his arms with a gesture of relief. "What a day!" he said; "Paul, I've got to go first. This proves it. I couldn't stand it. Yes; she's got to let me go first."

"It is to be regretted that we cannot arrange such matters," Paul said, his spectacles gleaming with sympathy.

Peter was not listening. "I tell you what!" he burst out, "I'm going to talk about—things, with her. You can bet your boots on that! I got a scare at my own ignorance this morning. I told her so. Yes; there's no use putting—things—*you* know what I mean? behind your back."

His brother nodded.

"I suppose you've got it all cut and dried?" Peter said, carelessly.

"I just believe what everybody else does."

"Well, I shall believe what she does. It will be all right after this. Eunice will tell me."

"Dr. Lavendar would tell you."

"Oh, well, that's his business, you know. With all respect to the cloth, I'd rather have Eunice's ideas. However, we needn't talk about it, now. Everything is all right. Paul, what do you think of building a little summer-house for her over by the dam?" He was glad to have Paul to talk to; talking kept him from examining too closely his certainty that all was well. "She's *absolutely* all right," he declared. "Yes; I'm going to build a summer-house for her. I have an idea of a Chinese pagoda Got a pencil? Here, I'll draw it on this envelope. Like this, you see—"

"Good idea," Paul said.

"I guess I'll take her to Philadelphia for a little trip," Peter ruminated; "might as well see another doctor, too. William's all right in ordinary things, like that attack this morning. I remember William when we were both put into breeches. You kind of don't have much confidence in a man when you remember him that way? He's too much like yourself. I want some real doctor to advise her about food, and all that kind of thing. I think she ought to take some kind of tonic; Willy doesn't give enough medicine. He does as well as he knows how, but—"

"Oh— Oh—" A voice shrilled down from the open window above them.

Then another voice: "*Run!* The doctor—"

There were flying feet on the stairs. "Mr. Walton—"

Even as the two men rushed into the house, they heard a scream:

"She's dead—"

They jostled each other on the staircase, and somehow Paul was first—it seemed as if Peter's feet were made of lead. At the door of her room, the sweat beading on his forehead from the effort to lift those heavy feet, he reeled and lurched against the wall; then stood, transfixed, staring. It was Paul who ran to her bedside, called her name, poured out a little brandy and held it to her mouth. Her delicate head fell to one side, and the brandy trickled from her parted lips. Peter, his hand over his mouth, still leaned against the frame of the door, gaping at his brother, and at the weeping women. Under his breath he said, thickly, "No, no, no."

Paul, laying the still figure back on the pillows, came over to him, touching him on the shoulder, and trying to speak. Peter was motionless, his face rigid. Through the open window, rising and falling with the evening wind, came the sound of many waters; the house thrilled faintly, like the thrilling of a muted harp-string. No one spoke. Then Peter said, in a loud whisper: "*There's some mistake!*"

Paul, weeping, shook his head. "Look," he said, and led him, almost pushed him, to the bedside. As Peter stood there, agape, his eyes fixed on the calm face, Paul gave hurried, frightened orders: "Saddle a horse! Bring the doctor! In-

stantly!" Then turned back to the silent man, still standing there, looking at the eternal silence before him. . . .

They stayed beside her until William King came, Peter quite speechless, except that he said once, dully, "It's a mistake—a mistake." And again: "I don't believe it."

There was nothing for the doctor to do. She had gone.

"*Where?*" Peter said in a whisper.

When William said, brokenly, something of heaven, he looked at him, blankly; then turned away, saying, in a loud voice:

"Get me some whisky!"

Dr. King nodded. "Yes; let him have it."

V

It was after twelve o'clock before the brothers were alone; then, reluctantly, William King went home.

"There's nothing more I can do," he told Paul. "I think he has stopped walking about. I left him sitting down. Get him to take that medicine I put in your room, if you can. He knocked the glass out of my hand when I gave it to him. But maybe he'll listen to you. I wish Dr. Lavendar was at home!"

When Paul went up-stairs to that quiet room, he found Peter standing with one foot on the

rung of a chair, his elbow on his knee, his chin on his clenched hand.

"Send those women away," he said.

"Good idea," Paul said, and signed to Ellen and Margaret, who were watching the quiet figure on the bed.

When they had gone, Peter, his chin still resting on his hand, looked at his brother, and motioned with his head towards the door.

"I don't want to leave you, Peter."

Apparently he was not heard.

"Peter, won't you come into my room and go to bed?"

Silence. Peter was staring at the white stillness of the covering sheet. Down in the front hall the clock struck one. Peter stood upright, drew a long breath, and seemed to brace himself as if for some tremendous effort of will; then, loudly:

"Eunice!"

Silence; except for the water, falling—falling —falling. And again:

"*Eunice . . . ?*"

He put his hand over his lips, as though even his own breathing must not break in upon his listening. But she did not answer. She, who had answered even his thoughts for all these years, was deaf to that orphaned cry! The night wind, hesitating, entering, flagging, made the sheet waver; the flame of the lamp shivered and Peter's listening shadow moved, monstrous, shapeless, across the bed and over the ceiling.

Silence. . . .

Stumbling back into a chair, he flung up his arms, and then his head sank into his hands. After a long while he lifted himself. "She's dead," he said. He looked at his brother, blinking, as though awakening from a stupor: "You here? William gone?"

"Yes; there was nothing he could—"

"Of course not. She's dead. Now you go, too."

"I am going to stay with you, Peter."

"I don't want you. Go."

It was at that moment that Paul saw, on the old red backgammon-board, which was still lying on the table at the foot of the bed, a pistol-case. His heart stood still. Peter, following his horrified eyes, nodded impatiently.

"Yes," he said.

"Peter, for God's—"

"I'm going after her. William stayed, and then those women came in. Now you're here. Why can't I be alone a minute? I ought to have gone at once—but I wasn't *sure*—I wanted to call her."

Paul put a hand on his shoulder. "You are out of your mind! Come into my room, away from—from— You'll come to your senses if you will just get out of this room."

"I am in my senses now. I'm going to follow her. Can't you understand me? I'm going after her! They've all interrupted me—" He had forgotten Paul's presence and was talking rapidly

to himself. "William stayed for hours. I couldn't get rid of him. He wanted to give me an opiate. An opiate!—to-night, of all nights! As if I could take the time to sleep! I mustn't lost another minute; not a minute." He was mumbling so that Paul could hardly hear him. "She's started, and I must catch up to her. I'm late now; very late!"

Paul put a shaking hand on the pistol-case. "It would be a sin—"

Peter looked at him for an astonished moment. "You?" he said; "I keep forgetting you are here. Don't talk religion. This is no time for religion! I'd commit every sin on earth to be with her! Give me that case."

He leaped at his brother, and a board in the floor creaked and sagged under his feet; the lamp on the bureau shook, and the shadows lurched about the room. Paul, holding the pistol-case behind him, fended him off with a bent elbow.

"Listen; it is cowardly!"

"Give it to me."

"Eunice would say it was wicked!"

For one instant her name checked him. Then he nodded his head. "But she'll forgive me. She's always forgiving me! And when she sees me coming, just as fast as I can, she'll— Oh, I'm late, I'm late! I'll make it all right with her as soon as I catch up to her. I promise you I will. Let me go!"

"He is mad," Paul was saying to himself. "How can I get word to William?"

He could not get word to any one. To attempt to leave the room, taking the pistol-case with him, was to invite a struggle, there, in that sacred presence! And to leave the pistols—Paul shook with terror. What could he say? Only the most commonplace words came stammering to his lips.

"She's seven hours ahead of you. You can't catch up to her!"

Peter stopped short, his crazy face suddenly keenly reasonable.

"Besides, how do you know which way she's gone?" Paul argued, backing away from him.

"I'll find her!"

"Maybe you can't. Maybe the track is all arranged, and the roads are to meet—yours and hers, some time. You run a risk; *you may be starting too soon.* Don't you see? A short cut may take you on ahead of her. You may miss her—in the dark."

Peter's eyes narrowed; he seemed to think deeply.

"I would suggest," Paul said, trembling, "that you should wait. It's something we don't understand, this business of Death. Life may be a big plan—" he was talking against time, stammering, repeating himself, talking on, and on, and on: "a plan; we travel along our own paths in it; each of us, you, me, Eunice. Paths side by side. Then hers branches off, for a while.

It will meet yours again, somewhere. We don't know just where. But if you take a short cut, you may miss the cross-roads! Perhaps," he stopped, gathering his courage for a wild risk, "*perhaps* if you'd done it this afternoon—but it's hours too late now! If you get out of your own path, now, you'll be ahead of her, and she won't be able to find you. She'll hunt for you in the dark; maybe wait, or lose her way; and all the time you'll be far ahead!"

Peter listened intently. "She said something once about paths. I remember that." He paused, staring blindly ahead of him. "I can see there is a chance of missing her," he said. He sat down and leaned his head in his hands; his shoulders loomed black against the stark figure on the bed.

Paul quivered with relief; neither man spoke. Suddenly Peter got on his feet.

"But it's a chance, either way. If I go, I may catch up to her—and I may not. If I wait, I may find her when my time comes—or I may not. Nobody knows. I'll chance it! I'll go."

Paul broke into terrified entreaties and arguments, but it was evident that his brother was not listening. He was talking to himself: "If she'd only told me what to do! But I wouldn't let her. It was my fault. Why didn't I let her tell me? She was always trying to, and I wouldn't let her. What a coward I was! And now I've just got to blunder along." He put his hand out for the case, still gripped under Paul's arm.

"Wait, just till morning—" Paul said. ("If I can stave him off till daylight, he'll come to himself," he thought, wildly.) "*If* it is a chance either way," he argued, slyly; "how do you know which chance to take? Good idea to wait, and think it over very carefully."

Peter gave him another of those strangely lucid looks. "There is no use in thinking it over. There's no way of deciding which is the best thing to do. No; I think I'd better chance chance." He was evidently hesitating. Paul heard his sigh of perplexity. "I could toss for it?" he said; he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a coin. As he balanced it on his thumb, his face grew quite calm; "Yes; I'll toss for it," he decided.

"Wait just a minute," Paul gasped. "Cards are better than a coin," he managed to say.

"She doesn't approve of cards."

"She would have called a toss-up gambling."

Peter frowned. "So she would," he said, impatiently, and put the coin back in his pocket; "but—" His voice trailed into silence. They both looked over at the sheeted figure, as if she would tell them what to do.

"I've got to do something," Peter said, fretfully.

"I don't see how you can," Paul objected, speaking very gently. "You see, she didn't approve of cards, or of flipping a coin, either. So we'll have to wait until morning." His eyes

strained into the darkness outside for some hint of dawn.

Peter was not listening. He was evidently puzzled; neither cards nor a coin? "What *can* I do?" he said; then his eye fell on the backgammon-board. "Why, that's the thing!" he said, almost joyously. "Why didn't I think of it? Eunice doesn't mind backgammon. We'll play one game. If I win, I'll go."

He brought the little table close to the bedside, and drew up the chairs; his mad eyes were eager and satisfied. "Sit down!" he said. He himself sat down and opened the board. "Reds or whites?" he asked, and fumbled about for the dice. Paul stood still, thinking intently. Then his face lightened, as if with some solemn purpose; he nodded his head, very slowly, and took his seat.

"Reds or whites?" Peter said again, impatiently.

Paul delayed; "Throw for it." The toss brought him the reds. Peter arranged his men swiftly. "Begin!" he said. The clock struck two.

Paul demurred. "No; toss for first throw."

Peter tossed. "Mine," he said, and began to play while Paul was still arranging his men, fumbling over them, dropping a checker, picking it up, and dropping it again. "Throw into your hand," he said, in a low voice; "there must be no noise."

Peter nodded. "Hurry."

Paul, looking past the crazy face at the dead woman on the bed, called to her in his heart for

help,—and threw low. Peter followed in a flash with five and four, and moved his men swiftly. "Your throw!"

Paul deliberated, delayed, again threw low; moved his men one by one, very slowly; then moved them back; deliberated; and finally placed them. Peter struck the board with his dice-box.

"Hurry! Hurry!"

For the next quarter of an hour the plays were made with every possible hesitation on Paul's part, and in total silence save for the soft cupping sound of the dice slipping into each palm, and the monotonous plunging of the water outside. Paul gained. Peter began to mutter to himself.

"I must win, Eunice, I *must* win! Help me and I'll catch up to you, somehow. Fix the dice, Eunice, fix them!"

Under his breath, his brother, too, was saying, "Eunice, show me how to do it." His dice came faltering into his thin old hand; Peter, looking once into his palm, gave a grunt of contempt.

"One and three! You'll have to do better than that," he said, and flung double fives. Paul could hardly hold his dice-box. . . . Peter's next move threw one of Paul's men out.

"Let us make it the best two games in three," Paul entreated. Peter, his eyes glittering, said, loudly:

"No! One game. Eunice is deciding it. One game! If she gives it to me, I'll follow her; if she gives it to you, I'll wait. I'm whipping you,

Paul; do you see? Eunice, I'm walloping him! You are going to let me come—Gammon! Gammon! I'm whipping him!"

He was. Paul threw low. Peter laughed loudly. "Eunice! I knew you would say 'Come'!" Then he looked into his own palm and frowned, —one and two. Paul threw high. Peter panted with terror: "Eunice, that was a mistake. You mustn't let him throw high!" Suddenly he put down his dice-box, and, turning, drew her hand from under the sheet.

Paul shivered back. "Peter, stop! It's sacrilege!"

But he would not stop. "She shall throw," he said; and closing the small, cold fingers around the box, let the dice fall into his own palm. "Double fives! Good for you, Eunice! I'll come." He put her hand back under the sheet. "You see?" he said, triumphantly; "she wants me!" And he moved his men.

Paul was breathing hard; he shook his dice-box softly, up and down, up and down—

"Throw!" Peter commanded.

But Paul delayed.

"Throw! I have no time to lose—"

Slowly the old brother slid the dice into his hand, instantly closed his fingers on them and swept them back into his box.

"What was it? I didn't see—"

"Double sixes," the older man said, in a whisper.

Peter's face changed sharply. "I thought it was five and two?"

Paul's veined old hand moved his men forward like a regiment.

Peter glared at him. "I *thought* I saw a deuce?" he questioned.

"It was double sixes," his brother repeated; and a moment later: "I've won."

Peter looked at the board, open-mouthed. "Why, Eunice!" he said; the reproachful astonishment of his voice was pitiful; "you want me to wait?" he said, incredulously. It seemed as if he could not believe it. "Why, *Eunice!*" He reproached her again, and suddenly burst out crying, like a child. "Please, Eunice, please—please—"

But even as he spoke his head sank on his breast; then his whole big body crumpled up, and he fell forward over the backgammon-board, which lurched and tilted, until the red and white checkers tumbled out and rolled over the carpet. The board closed with a bang. Peter slipped slowly sidewise to the floor.

He was insensible when his brother reached him; and Paul, loosening his collar, looked over at the shape of peace under the white sheet, and said, brokenly:

"I had to, Eunice; it was the only way."

VI

Of course it was the only way. When William heard what Paul had done, he said so, emphatically.

"When Peter comes to himself, he will be the first to admit it," he tried to comfort Paul, when, with a rigid face, the little old brother confessed his deception. He did not confess it for nearly a month, and then it was wrung from him only because of Peter's wonderful calmness. For Peter had opened the third volume. . . . The first volume had been written with the bold hand of Joy, and its words were Selfishness and Arrogance and Power. The second was written by the hand of Love; its words were Success and Content. In the third, there was to be only one word, written by the small, dead hand of Vanished Happiness — the word Peace. Sometimes it seemed as if that gentle hand touched him on the shoulder, as if to say, "*Be still.*" For he was very still.

At first his stillness was the stillness of something dead—dead joy, dead hope. But by and by it seemed to be only the pause of Life, waiting to live more fully; for, to everybody's astonishment, he began to accept grief with a sweetness that was almost cheerfulness. It was then that William King commented on it to Paul.

"I'm thankful he takes it this way," Willy said, "but I don't understand it."

"I understand it," the old man said, slowly. He was dreadfully haggard; more so, the doctor thought, perplexed, than was Peter himself; and his nervousness was pitiably apparent.

"He seems entirely resigned," said Dr. King.

"He thinks he is," Paul said; then broke out: "I deceived him; that's why he's resigned."

The doctor looked at him closely. "Better tell me about it," he said, kindly. When he had been told, he said just what Paul himself had said: "It was the only way."

"Yes," Paul agreed, "it was a good idea. He'd have won if I hadn't lied to him. But he will never forgive me when he knows it."

"Oh, yes, he will," William assured him. "Peter would be the first to say you did right. Why, my dear fellow, he was out of his mind! Of course you had to—to—"

"—*cheat*," Paul ended, briefly.

"It wasn't cheating," William said, stoutly. "It was no more than every doctor does a hundred times in his practice."

"That," the little man interrupted, drearily, "is why Peter doesn't like doctors—except you. He says they are liars. And Peter never forgives a lie. He says it's damnable. And of course it is. But I'm willing to be damned. You mustn't think I mind being damned. If it was to be done over again, I should do it. But he will never forgive me. That's what I mind."

"Well, then, don't tell him," the doctor said, bluntly; "at any rate, until he's himself again."

"Good idea," said Paul, dully.

But the "self" they had known was long in coming. The man of violence and intolerance was gone, and in his place was a very quiet man,

very still, very patient. A man who waited. He was willing enough to say why this change had come: "She won that game," he told Paul once, in those first weeks of stunned obedience. "She fixed the dice. So I am willing to wait." He even spoke to Dr. King about it. "I want you to know Eunice gave me a sign, William. I didn't use to believe in ghosts, and that sort of thing, but I do now. Eunice gave me a sign."

William King nodded.

"I'd just as lief tell you about it," Peter said. "I wanted to rush right after her, that night she died, and I got out my pistol. And Paul came in and suggested that I might miss her. Seemed reasonable, when I stopped to think of it. So I said, 'we'll leave it to chance.' So we played for it. I told Eunice that if she could fix it so we could meet, to let me know by making me win. If she couldn't, why, she must give Paul the game. He threw double sixes. That settled it. It's hard to wait, William, but I always have followed Eunice's judgment in matters of that kind."

"I see," William said, gravely. "Well, I am sure Eunice was right."

"I am satisfied," Peter said, contentedly, "and I tell you what, Willy, I owe it all to old Paulus. He suggested it. If it hadn't been for him I'd have gone blundering after her, and got lost, sure as you're alive! Paul saved me."

When the doctor repeated this to Paul Walton,

the old man (he had grown old very rapidly after that night of grief and fear and deceit) looked at him with dismay.

"Why did you pretend it was so?"

"Because it makes him happier to believe it, and it doesn't do anybody any harm."

Paul shook his head, but William insisted.

"On that one point Peter isn't sane; but it's better to be crazy on one point and happy, than sane on all points and unhappy. You must never tell him, Paul."

"I'll have to, some time," Paul said; "I couldn't die with a lie between us."

That night, in Dr. Lavendar's study, William justified himself: "Of course, Paul had to cheat," he said, "but poor old Peter!" he ended, sighing, "he is just like a lost child! She used to do his thinking for him. Do you remember how he used to say his life was written in two volumes? The first volume was all Peter; the second, Eunice and Peter?"

"What about the third volume?" said Dr. Lavendar.

William looked surprised: "You mean his life without her?"

"The third volume will be *all* Eunice," Dr. Lavendar said.

"Oh," said William, vaguely; "yes." Of course, Dr. Lavendar was right, but ordinary folks have to keep their feet on the earth, and as far as this earth goes, Peter had lost Eunice. William did

not obtrude his materialism. "Isn't it strange?" he said. "In everything else Peter is as sane as a clock, but he really believes she gave Paul that game! Of course Paul must hold his tongue."

"Doctors are always certain of everything," Dr. Lavendar said, admiringly. "Now, some of the rest of us wouldn't dare say she didn't;—or she did. And as for a lie, it's a dangerous thing to live with; it festers."

William listened—respectfully, of course; but he said to himself that the old saint was really getting pretty old. "We mustn't say a word about it," he admonished him, kindly, but a little condescendingly.

Dr. Lavendar cocked an eye at him over his spectacles: "When you retire from the case, William, I will prescribe; or I'll present you with my formula now? Paul ought to have told Peter the next day; *but not on Peter's account!* The Kingdom of Heaven has suffered a good deal of violence from Peter; he has always taken it by force and he always will. But Paul ought to have told him for his own sake."

There was, however, so far as anybody knew, no occasion for Dr. Lavendar to prescribe. Paul's remorse was silent. All the same, the lie festered in his heart, as Dr. Lavendar had said it would. The second year he began to fail.

"He has never got over Eunice's loss," Peter told William King; the doctor had been summoned

one January morning, and was struggling into his big buffalo coat in the hall.

"Very cold weather is hard on old people," he encouraged Peter.

But Peter knew it was not the weather that was sapping Paul. "He misses Eunice," he said, gently. "If only she had given us the word, we could both have gone after her. It's very hard on him to wait, too."

"I've given him a tonic," William said.

"It will do about as much good as one of your bread pills. I'm worried about him, Willy."

"Bread pills have their value," the doctor said, dryly. "I'm worried, too," he added, but he did not say about whom. "If Paul blurts it all out," he thought to himself, "Peter 'll go after her, yet!"

Paul had said his brother would never forgive a deception; and William, after a friendship of more than fifty years, knew Peter well enough to think he was right. The idea of the cheated man's anger shaking a death-bed so shocked and alarmed him that he thought uneasily of that "prescription" which Dr. Lavendar said ought to have been given "the next day." "He knew a good deal," William thought, sadly. "I wish I had dared to give Paul the old saint's medicine."

But he did not dare, now, and there was no Dr. Lavendar in Old Chester to give his own medicine for the cure of a soul. All Dr. King could do was to care for Paul's body. A quarrel

with Peter would kill him, the doctor thought, and again he urged the failing old man to be silent.

But Paul, yielding and timid and submissive all his harmless life, was, on this one most harmful idea, at the very end of life, immovably courageous. He was entirely alive to the possibilities of his brother's unforgiving anger; as for the possibility of Peter's still carrying out that purpose which Paul's lie had thwarted, "that," the little old brother said, faintly, "isn't any of my business, now."

"Well, anyway, Paul, don't tell him when I'm not around," William entreated. "I must be with Peter."

"Good idea," said old Paul, and drowsed a little.

Outside, the brilliant January day had laid a white finger on the river's thunderous lip, and the house was strangely still. The doctor, sitting at Paul's bedside, thought of the soft, enfolding roar that night when Eunice had slept in frozen stillness and old Paul had damned himself to save Peter's soul. "Greater love hath no man than that," he thought; "I guess Paul is as sure of heaven as Eunice herself!" He looked at the small figure, making a little mound under the comforters, and wished he might slip away in his sleep.

The very next afternoon when his sleigh came over the creaking snow, and stopped at the Waltons' gate, Peter met him with a haggard face.

"He's sinking, William."

"I was afraid so," said the doctor.

"But he's very anxious to see you. Said he couldn't die before you came, because he promised to do something—I can't quite make out what. He's wandering, I think."

William nodded. "You better wait outside," he told Peter, pausing at Paul's door. But there came a feeble voice from within:

"No; Peter must come in. Willy can wait outside, if anybody does."

So the two men entered together, Peter on noisy tiptoe, and blowing his nose with a great flourish of a red silk handkerchief.

"I'm in a hurry," Paul said, fretfully; "you've kept me waiting, William. Peter, I want to tell you, it wasn't double sixes. It was five and two."

Peter looked at the doctor: "Wandering?"

"No," Paul said, sharply; "I'm not. I cheated you that night. That's all. Now you can go, William, and let me die in peace. He can kill me if he wants to."

Peter, listening, perplexed, agape, suddenly understood. The color rushed furiously to his face; he lifted his hands, his fingers opening and closing; he said some incoherent, stammering words. Perhaps his mind staggered in this sudden assault upon a fixed and necessary belief. . . . What? She *hadn't* told him to stay? She *hadn't* indicated that it was not safe to follow her? The room whirled around him; he clutched at the bedpost to keep on his feet. . . . He had lost his chance to catch up to her!

Paul looked at him wearily. "I would suggest that you should forgive me," he said. "Of course, if I get well, it needn't hold." But even as he spoke Peter's color ebbed, and his face calmed, as it used to calm at the old command, "Be still."

"Oh," he said, breathing hard, as though he had been running; "I understand! For a minute I didn't—understand. Eunice made you cheat. I had to lose, so she made you cheat to make me lose? She didn't know she oughtn't to. It was only a game to her; she never understood—honor." He still panted for breath, but he smiled. "You remember, she never understood? To her, a game was just a game. Just amusement. Don't you remember that she couldn't understand why we were so hard on Alex Morgan? Paul, if you see her before I do, tell her I obeyed orders; tell her I'm waiting. But explain to her that that sort of thing really won't do. She mustn't cheat. She really mustn't! Make it clear, Paul."

"Good idea," Paul said, and drowsed into peace.

. . . . . .

"It's just as the old saint said," William thought, as in the yellow winter sunset he drove across the creaking snow back to Old Chester. "Peter will believe what he has to believe. Paul might as well have told the truth the next day, and spared himself the burden of his poor little lie. It wasn't necessary. And who knows! perhaps Eunice really *did*—?"

THE THIEF

THE THIEF

I

OPINION in Old Chester was divided as to the propriety of Dr. Lavendar's course in assisting Oscar King to run away with Miss Ferris's niece; most of the new people thought, "considering the circumstances," that he had been quite right; but some of the old people were affronted. Judge Morrison said to his sister, his thin lips curling back from his yellow teeth:

"If I had a daughter I would put an injunction on Edward Lavendar for safety. I don't know but what I'll do it anyhow, on your account, Hannah; you're such a lovely creature! Jim Shields will be running off with you, the first thing I know."

The poor old maid, who had never grown callous to her brother's gibes, reddened slowly under her leathery skin; but she said to herself, "Dr. Lavendar was right!"

Mrs. Dale, on the contrary, was "painfully astonished"; and Mrs. Barkley said that "Dr. Lavendar did not consider the example to youth;

still, she would always believe in the probity of his motives, no matter what happened."

"For my part," said Jim Shields to his brother, "I consider the dominie accessory before the crime; but, Lord! Horace, I hope he won't reform in case anybody should undertake to run away with our Annie!"

As for their Annie, she approved of Dr. Lavendar, and said so courageously right and left. Yet, dear me! what a difference the personal equation does make in matters of judgment! When Dr. Lavendar put his finger in Annie's pie, how it altered her belief in his wisdom!

Annie was the twins' niece—"the twins" being Horace and James Shields, who lived on Main Street, next door to the post-office. Only once had there been any rival in the affection of these two old men for each other, and that was so long ago that they had both forgotten it. "Passing the love of women," Dr. Lavendar said once of that silent, dogged devotion that kept little Mr. Horace at James's elbow, to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; for the elder brother (the elder by some twenty minutes) had been a paralytic since he was thirty-five, and a little later an illness had stolen his sight. But in spite of what he called his "cussed body," Jim Shields was the heart and mind of the Shields household; he directed and protected his twin; bossed him and bullied him (at least so Old Chester said), but always with a curious and touching tenderness.

As for old Mr. Horace, he simply lived for James.

Into this absorbed household came, when she was thirty, the daughter of a younger brother who had died abroad. She had found instantly in poor, sleepy, behind-the-times Old Chester a hundred interests: the town needed a library—the money must be raised for it! "The poor Smiths'" second girl was an undeveloped genius—she must be sent to a school of design, so that she might become a great artist. The shiftless Todds only had meat three times a week—they must be properly fed; it was horrible to think of such destitution! Dr. Lavendar reminded her that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat; but Annie had a different theory—at least in regard to the man's family. Indeed, it must be admitted that this warm-hearted, energetic woman had a good many theories, and she talked about them until all Old Chester found her just a little fatiguing. As for the twins, at first the presence of their strong, happy, vital niece was bewildering; then her dramatic appreciation of the helplessness of one uncle and the gentleness of the other, her readiness to throw herself into their interests and claim and command a share in their lives, the passionate devotion with which she served them, made the two old men first amazed, then flattered, then dependent, and then—but that is looking ahead!

When Annie was forty, when for ten years she

had decided what would make them comfortable, what would amuse them, what they needed for health and happiness (and decided wisely, too), the two old brothers may have had opinions which they did not share with the world. It is possible that they were tired of being "interesting"; that James, who had a large nose and a big, powerful head, wearied of being told (and having other people told) how clever he was, and how dear and good and patient—"though he will use naughty words sometimes," Annie would say, laughing. Old Mr. Horace used to wince, and open and shut his eyes rapidly, when Annie declared, her own pretty eyes beaming with tenderness, that he was perfectly sweet! But all the same, the two old gentlemen—they were really old when the time came for Annie's story—the two old men always said that they were very fortunate in having their niece to take care of them. "And," said Old Chester, "no doubt Annie's money helps them along a little." For everybody knew that the twins had very little money of their own.

Annie was not rich; she was only what is called "in comfortable circumstances"; but when she came to live with her uncles, she must have been in uncomfortable circumstances, a good deal of the time, for, in spite of their worried protests, she spent far more money on the two old men than on herself. Annie Shields's generosity in this respect was proverbial in Old Chester, and several friends remonstrated with her about it

—though their admiration took the edge off reproof.

"My dear, you shouldn't spend *all* your money on your uncles! Why don't you have this, or that, or the other? You ought not to be so unselfish, you dear child!" And Annie, smiling, would shake her head and say, "It's just selfishness, dear Mrs. Dale [or Mrs. Dove, or Mrs. Dilworth, whomever it might be]—I *like* to do it."

And when she told this truth, the admiring remonstrator only admired her the more, and never knew that it was the truth. If the brothers ever winced at being made her beneficiaries, it was not in public. When Annie presented her Uncle James with a new and very elaborate wheeled chair, the old man may have set his teeth and thought a "naughty word," and Uncle Horace may have sighed, and said: "Make the best of it. Let her enjoy herself. And the chair isn't bad, Jimmy?"

"No, it isn't bad, and she means to be kind, damn it; she means to be kind!" the old invalid reminded himself; and never had the heart to jar the girl's enjoyment of sacrifice by telling her how it tried him to receive it. But in spite of such bad moments the two uncles did come to depend on her. They gave her nothing but affection—they had nothing else to give—that, and a roof and the opportunity to rule and order their elderly lives; and she gave them service and devotion and comfort and love and unstinted ad-

miration. So it will be seen that they had no claim upon her. No one could possibly say that she owed them any duty when it came to a question of her own life—when it came to the arrival upon the scene of her Mr. Hastings. No, even Old Chester admitted reluctantly that the twins had no claim on Annie; for years, for her own pleasure, she had sacrificed herself for them; and now, still for her own pleasure, she was going to sacrifice them. But she was no more selfish in the one case than in the other.

Thomas Hastings was nearly forty when he met Annie, who was a year or two older;—a warm-hearted, shallow man, quite good-looking, and with an aptitude little short of genius for reflecting and repeating whatever was admirable in his friends' opinions. Not that he was in the least a hypocrite; he merely assented with all his heart to any sentiment which was obviously noble, or, as he used to say, "superb"; and he thought he originated it. He was, in fact, an excellent transmitting medium for other persons' ideas. A kindly, fatuous, histrionic man, he had fallen in love many times, but his love-affairs had not prospered. It was rumored that he had proposed to Susan Carr when she was visiting in Mercer, and that she had replied that when she married she would marry a man; not herself in trousers. The fact was poor Tom repelled strong personalities, more especially among his own sex than among women, who, for the most part, regarded him with

a good-natured amusement—recollecting that he had made love to them in the past.

As for old Chester, when Tom Hastings came to visit the Macks, and fell in love with Miss Shields, it said he was an agreeable person and would make Annie a good husband. The Macks, perhaps, had misgivings when they saw how things were going; or at least Mrs. Mack had. But her husband tried to reassure her. "He's only a fool," said Mr. Mack, "not a knave."

But Mrs. Mack could not help remembering how she had praised Annie to her susceptible guest, and appealed to Annie's kindness for the guest, who at that particular time chanced to be in some business gloom. Annie's sympathies had been instantly stirred; and as for Mr. Hastings, he had been quick to applaud when Mrs. Mack told him that Annie was giving up her life to the two old uncles.

"And when you remonstrate with her," said Mrs. Mack, warmly, the tears in her good, kind eyes, "the child just says, 'Well, Mrs. Mack, I don't see what one can do better with one's life than to give it to other people.'"

"Superb!" said Tom Hastings, heartily.

"And she has such an admiration for goodness," Mrs. Mack continued; "she says that character is the greatest thing in the world. I don't know just what she means," said Mrs. Mack, thoughtfully, "but she certainly does appreciate goodness in people."

"Ah, fine! fine!" said Mr. Hastings, cordially.

Now those who admire what we believe to be admirable are always persons of great common sense; so, after that, Mrs. Mack was disposed to think well of Mr. Hastings, and she said very nice things about him to Miss Annie Shields, who was always hospitable to enthusiasms. "He spoke with so much appreciation of you, dear," said Mrs. Mack.

"Of me?" said Annie, surprised. "He doesn't know anything about me!"

"Oh, well, I told him a few things," Mrs. Mack confessed, her honest, motherly face beaming with kindness.

"Why, you naughty woman!" Annie said, laughing. "He'll find me out when he meets me."

So she also was disposed to think well of Mr. Hastings; and when she saw him, handsome, somewhat sad (his latest refusal had discouraged him), with great manner and also good manners—two things not necessarily seen together—when she was told that he wrote (but, through some fine reserve, did not publish) poetry, when she heard all her own theories of art and conduct echoing in almost her own words from his lips—why, then she fell in love with him. In fact, it was almost love at first sight. She had called at the Macks' to see Gertrude about something, and there was this big man, with a piercing blue eye, blond hair that stood up in a sort of pompadour, and who, with folded arms and intent expression,

preserved a fine silence. Mrs. Mack began, as usual, a protest that Annie was wearing herself out for other people, when, lo! this new man said, quietly: "Why not? Can one do anything better with one's life than to spend it for others?" Annie turned and looked at him with a start. How true that was, but how fine to say it! How unlike the tiresome praise of people like Mrs. Mack! She answered him with the eager enthusiasm which had kept her young in spite of her forty years.

"Indeed you are quite right, Mr. Hastings. Giving is really receiving, isn't it?"

"To give *is* to receive," Tom answered, his eyes narrowing with some subtle thought. Then he came and sat down beside her, and looked at her so intently that Annie felt her face flush; but she said to herself that he was so in earnest that she did not believe he even saw her. He was very confiding; "those deep, simple natures always are," Annie told Mrs. Mack afterwards. He told her he had failed in business, and was looking about for something to do. "You haven't a job in boot-blacking in Old Chester?" he inquired, with a fine gaiety that Annie felt was a very beautiful and cheerful courage. She responded in the same vein, and said there would at least be no competition in such a venture in Old Chester; and all the while her eyes were bright with interest and appreciation.

"Oh, competition," said Tom Hastings, who was

coming down from his ethical high horse and getting frivolous—"competition is the life of trade, you know!"

"It is the death of honesty," cried Annie, who had theories in the direction of political economy which she and Gertrude Mack used to discuss passionately. Mr. Hastings' face was instantly intense.

"Competition cuts the throat of honesty," he said. "Miss Shields, I could not say it to every one, but *you* will understand me when I say I am proud to have failed in business."

"I do understand," she said, in a low voice. "And I can guess the temptation to succeed, too, to a man of—of power, Mr. Hastings." Annie was trembling with the reality of what she said.

"I wonder," he said, with a certain boyish impulsiveness that always touched women—his face absorbed and eager, and looking up at her from under his frowning, blond eyebrows—"I wonder if you will think me too informal if I say that the understanding of a woman like you—makes character seem the most important thing in the world?"

Annie took this somewhat solid flattery without a quiver. It is amazing how much flattery a sensible middle-aged woman can absorb!

When he went away, Mr. Hastings took her hand and bowed deeply in silence; then he gave her a long look.

Annie was stirred through and through; she went home tingling with excitement. At supper

she told her uncles all about this new man, with the sweet vehemence which was part of her own charm.

"He said such beautiful things! Uncle Jim, he must come and see you. I know how you will delight in him. He has that same passion for generosity that you have yourself, you dear, improvident uncle! He said (I think this is really an epigram), '*To give is to receive.*' When you think of all that means!"

"Well," said Jim Shields, "the remark was passed some two thousand years ago that it was more blessed to give than to receive; but I suppose this is an improvement?"

Annie laughed good-naturedly. "How you do love to take me down, Uncle Jim! But all the same, it was fine—and *so* unusual!"

It was;—Old Chester never said beautiful things about such commonplaces as kindness, or generosity, or ordinary honesty; not even Dr. Lavendar called it "superb" to be amiable to your invalid uncle. So when Mr. Hastings echoed Miss Shields's ideas it was no wonder that she felt, as she told Helen Smith, that she had found a gold-mine of character!

But because he repeated to her her theories of philanthropy, the gold-mine was pushed into parish work, and compelled to visit the poor in Annie's company. Because he agreed to all she said concerning the talent of the "poor Smiths'" girl, he was obliged to look at numberless sheets of

smudgy charcoal-drawings, and as Annie found her artistic judgment indorsed, her determination to send the girl away from home to study, was greatly strengthened. Because he declared that her Uncle Jim was "wonderful," he had to go into Mr. James Shields's room and bear that gentleman's not too subtle sarcasm every time he called upon Jim's niece. He sympathized with Annie's effort to raise money to start a free library. He rejoiced that somebody should feed the hungry and clothe the naked and look out for the improvident Todds. To Annie, it was like seeing all her ideals suddenly embodied; and she never knew that she was only staring rapturously into a looking-glass!

Well, the upshot of it all was they were married.

One or two people looked dubious when the engagement was announced; but no one gave *Punch's* advice. After all, why should they? Whose business was it? She was old enough to judge for herself, and there was nothing bad about the man.

The two old uncles never dreamed of objecting.

"You see," her Uncle James said to her Uncle Horace—"you see, Annie is—mature. She's cut her eye-teeth; and if she likes him, do, for the Lord's sake, let her marry him! I've always been afraid she'd be a missionary or go on the stage."

Uncle Horace sighed: "Oh, he's all right, I suppose. But I don't take to him."

"Well, you don't have to marry him. I can't

find out that he ever robbed any hen-roosts. I'd like him better if he had. But he's perfectly ladylike. He's a sentimental cuss, but Annie likes sentiment. My objection is to his looks. You say he has a lot of chin, and no nose to speak of. I hate a man with no nose! And he goes and sits with the women in the afternoons, and reads his poems to 'em—"

"Well," interrupted the other uncle, patiently, "if Annie likes that sort of thing, that's the sort of thing she'll like; and so long as there is nothing against the man's character, it isn't our business. Her money is in trust."

"Yes," Jim Shields agreed, "and I don't see why she shouldn't spend it on anything she wants to."

That she would no longer spend it on them made these two gentlemen extremely careful not to express any latent opposition they may have felt.

So there was no protest from the bride's side. And as for the groom, unless the various ladies who had refused him during the last score of years had announced that they wished to reconsider the matter, there could be no protest from his side. So they were married; and Tom wrote an epithalamium for the wedding-day which began:

See the dawn—high heaven-sent dawn!

And Annie had it printed on squares of white satin which were presented to the wedding-guests as souvenirs of the happy occasion.

They settled down in Old Chester for the summer, because, Annie said, it was necessary for Mr. Hastings to have absolute leisure to decide the very important question of his future occupation. Mr. Hastings had failed in the real-estate business, because, Annie said, with smiling elation, he was too honest and straightforward for the meanness of business life!

"I suppose he told you so himself?" her Uncle James suggested, with a guileless look; Annie agreed, eagerly: "yes, indeed! one of the first things which attracted me to Tom was his protest against the immorality of competition."

"You don't say so!" her Uncle James said, but his tone made Annie angry. She left the two old men with a cold good-by; they did not appreciate Tom, and so she ceased to appreciate them. Indeed, she ceased to appreciate many things: the Todds were lucky if they had meat once a week in those days; the "poor Smiths'" second daughter drew ginger-jars and lemons, uncheered by prophesies of future fame; Old Chester may have pined for literature, but nobody was commissioned to draw plans for a library. Annie Hastings' heart and mind were absorbed in her own happiness, and in the pride of realizing that she was the wife of a great man. Her passionate ambition was to help the great man make up his mind just how he had best express himself to the world, in so doing, help his fellow-men. "What else is life for, but to help others?" he asked solemnly.

Meantime, they rented the Poindexter house. One says the Poindexter house, though it was really the Shore house. Mrs. Shore's mother had been a Poindexter before her marriage, and the Shores owned it, but rarely lived in it. One wonders if any contagion of grief or shame lingers about old houses? Cecil Shore had married a high-minded egotist; there had been scenes of cruelty here; there had been that bitterness which only marriage can produce in the human heart; there had been disappointment and selfishness, hatred and misery, and the crash of broken ideals.

And to this house came the bride and groom to spend their first wedded summer. Old Chester made its call, and talked about the pair before the iron gate at the foot of the garden had fairly closed behind it.

"How long do you suppose it will be before she finds him out?"

"Oh, she'll never find him out! She idealizes him so entirely that she is blind. How long do you suppose he can live up to her ecstasies? It must be very fatiguing."

"Ah, *that's* the serious thing," said Mrs. Mack, who was a wise woman, even if she was new in Old Chester.

It was serious; and yet other people's good opinions of us are very good props to character. If our nearest and dearest believe us to be Raphaels or Shakespeares or Platos, it is hard not to at least pose in the attitudes of these great folks.

As for Tom Hastings, he was bewildered by Annie's adoration of him, of his poetry, and his virtues. After all, could he be expected to say, "Madam and wife, I am a poor, shallow, amiable jackass, and as such I tender you my devotion"? That surely would have been more than human!

Besides, his humility would only have convinced her of his true greatness, and been a triumphant proof of her unerring judgment.

II

The first mist in this cloudless sky of domestic happiness grew out of Tom's amiable way of saying he "believed people were right."

Mr. Hastings had really the most kindly feeling in the world for Dr. Lavendar; he once wrote a poem, called "Cure of Souls," in which he paid a very pretty tribute to "reverent age"; but when Helen Smith pointed out the old clergyman's shortcomings, he gave his generous, big-voiced assent to her opinions,—which was very agreeable to her, but which, before he knew it, committed him to the opposition in regard to Dr. Lavendar.

As it happened, he and Annie had never talked parish matters over; she was too absorbed in him to have revealed her affection for Dr. Lavendar. Hence, not knowing it, he ardently accepted Miss

Helen Smith's feeling,—that the old man was behind the times, an injury to the church, and a drag upon progress; so he said he "believed Miss Smith was right."

"Well, then, you'll help us, won't you, Mr. Hastings?" Helen pleaded, prettily.

"I will," he said, with his grave, intent look. Helen Smith drew a long breath, and said, a little seriousness stealing in among her dimples, that it made her believe in a special providence, people were so good to her in helping her work for the church.

Mr. Hastings, cheerful and good-looking, his very pompadour bristling with sympathy for every good word and work, said that her sense of responsibility for the wheels of progress was superb.

"I hate to have the wheels go over Dr. Lavendar," Helen said, "but the church must be our first consideration."

"But we must treat him with the utmost kindness," Tom declared. On the way home he had certain generous promptings in the way of collecting other people's money to console Dr. Lavendar with a purse—he knew that Annie would approve of generosity.

"We must do the *big* thing," he said to himself, as he came into the hall, and heard the rustle of Annie's skirts as she came running down-stairs to meet him, and hang upon his arm, and murmur that she had missed him dreadfully. Now any

man, a little tired, and quite hungry, and aware that the soup is on the table, who upon such an occasion has yet the presence of mind to say, in an impassioned voice, "My *Life!*" contributes to an atmosphere of domestic intensity which is as good as felicity.

"Ah, how happy I am!" sighs Annie; "I don't deserve it."

"Beloved," he replies, in his deep, rich voice, with an eye on the dining-room door, "what am I, that I should have been so blessed? Ah, my wife, a man comes to believe in a special providence when life is so good to him." And, gently, he leads her out to dinner.

"Oh, Tom," she said, passionately, "happiness does make us know divine things, doesn't it?" He shook his head in a sort of speechless reverence.

It is too bad to make fun of Tom; he was not a hypocrite; he was simply an artist in words. Indeed, he used words so skilfully that by saying something of the peacefulness of life and the blessing of content, there was, in his hearty praise of his dinner, no jolt from ecstasy to eating. Tom thought a good deal about his food; it is a Pennsylvania characteristic.

"This salad is a poem," he said. And Annie gave thanks to Heaven that she had married a man so far removed from mere material enjoyment. Still, although devoutly conscious of her happiness, she remembered the unhappiness of others less blessed than herself. To be sure, such

remembrance may be as mustard to our meat, making us all the more satisfied with our own condition. But never mind that; Annie remembered it.

"Tom," she said, "what do you think? Isn't it abominable? There is a sort of movement on foot to get rid of Dr. Lavendar. Mrs. Mack told me about it this afternoon. Isn't it incredible that there can be baseness like that right here among us in Old Chester?"

Tom looked up, frowning.

"Ah," Annie said, smiling, "you are the most sympathetic person! I don't know anybody so quick to feel injustice to others."

"Well, injustice is the one thing which is intolerable to me," he said, warmly.

"And to think of that old man, who has spent his life for us, being turned out, just because he is old-fashioned!" Annie went on, with spirit. "It's outrageous! I just said to Mrs. Mack, 'Well, Mr. Hastings and I are old-fashioned too.' I knew how you would feel."

Tom drank his wine, and then looked at his glass intently, compressing his lips.

"I suppose," he said, nodding his head, slowly, "the complaint is that he does not follow the newer lines of church work. Wouldn't it be possible to suggest it to him, and compromise, so to speak, with the new element, so that the wheels of progress should not go over the old saint?"

"How instantly you grasp the situation!" she

exclaimed. "It's wonderful to me—I think so much more slowly. He *is* an old saint, but he doesn't want any change in the parish work; that's the trouble. Helen Smith has proposed several things, but he snubbed her unmercifully. No; compromise isn't possible. The dear old man must have his own way as long as he lives. Probably he won't live very long. Oh, Tom, it's such a relief to know that you will fight for us!"

"I am your knight," he told her (and they had been married two months!). But he looked disturbed, and she was instant to throw off other people's troubles because they troubled him.

"Now don't worry about it," she said, as they went into the library. "I'm sure it will be all right. Your opinion will have the greatest weight, of course."

"I hate injustice," Tom murmured, frowning. "I hate unkindness; perhaps it is because I am so happy. Sometimes I think that happiness teaches us heavenly things; happiness teaches us goodness."

The tears started in her eyes. "Oh!" she said, "how true that is—how true and beautiful! Tom, you must write a poem on that."

And she went over to her desk and took out a little note-book, and copied her husband's words carefully. Tom Hastings, fat, fatuous, and complacent, saw this tender deed, but having, poor fellow, not the slightest sense of humor, he was not uncomfortable.

III

That was the beginning of Mr. Hastings' domestic *descensus Averni.* The next step was Judge Morrison's fancy for rummaging in his garret to find some papers. He did not find the papers, but he found a box of mildewed old books, "Keepsakes" and "Gifts" which had belonged, back in the dim past, to Hannah, when she was a girl; they had been packed into a box and thrust into the garret, to be out of the way.

Theophilus Morrison picked up one of these dusty books absently, trying to think where he must look next for his papers; and then his eye caught the old steel-plate frontispiece. It was the same languid, lovely lady at whom we used to look in our mothers' albums—ringlets on either side of the drooping oval face, enormous black eyes, rosebud mouth, beautiful arms, and wonderfully pointed finger-tips. Under it was written, in delicate script,

The Bride

Now what demon possessed Theophilus Morrison, who sneered at sentiment, to glance at the accompanying "Epithalamium," which began,

See the dawn, the heaven-sent dawn!

Well, well! Dr. Lavendar once said that Theophilus Morrison's business in life was to prick other people's bubbles. "Be sure your poetry

will find you out!" the Judge said to himself, chuckling. The moon-eyed bride for whom, fifty years or more ago, some nameless rhymster poured these feeble lines, had risen from the dust, and claimed her own!

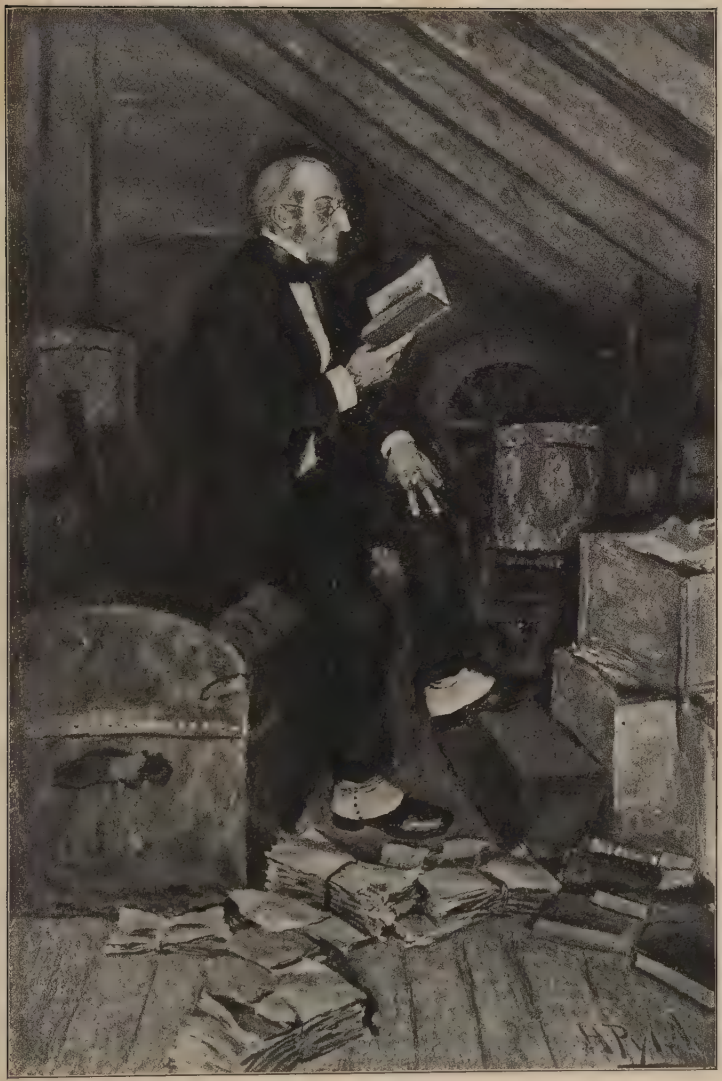
The garret darkened as a summer thundershower suddenly came up and dashed against the cobwebbed windows; but Judge Morrison sat there on an old cowhide trunk and read these harmless jingles, chuckling and sneering. He brought the book down with him to his library, stopping at Hannah's door and calling out to her, in his strident voice, to bring him that driveling stuff of Tom Hastings' that was printed on satin.

"You know what I mean?" he said. "You old maids always keep men's gush about their love affairs."

Hannah brought the square of satin to the library and handed it to him, her lean old hand shaking, and her poor, frightened lower lip sucked in like a child's who is trying not to cry.

"I knew you'd have it," he said, with his cruel smile. He compared the two "poems," and the result was most satisfactory—to him. Then he wrapped the book and Tom Hastings' epithalamium up together, and filed them away for "future reference."

As for Mr. Hastings, it seemed to him that public appreciation of his willingness to oust Dr. Lavendar grew like some baleful mushroom; in vain he tried to catch up with it, to destroy it! For a week Annie was at home with a cold, unable



JUDGE MORRISON READ THESE HARMLESS JINGLES, CHUCKLING AND SNEERING

to see the various kind friends who would doubtless have mentioned, casually, how glad they were that Mr. Hastings agreed with them that, for the good of the parish, Dr. Lavendar ought to go. So poor Tom got in deeper and deeper with the opposition; and every night, as he sat by Annie and held her hand, and perhaps read her his verses or some "thoughts," he got in deeper and deeper with the conservatives; and he was very wretched. Whenever he tried to hedge with Annie, she misunderstood him.

"I feel that the new element has a certain amount of reason in what they say," he would begin.

And she would agree hastily: "Oh yes! I only wish I was as fair-minded as you are. Indeed, Tom, your tenderness for Dr. Lavendar is the most beautiful thing to me. You are such an intellectual giant, and yet you are so patient with him. Now you, being so head and shoulders above Old Chester, might perhaps be expected to be out of patience with the dear old man's poky ways; and yet you are not. Your appreciation of his courage in marrying that poor, silly little Dorothea to Oscar King, was so discriminating."

"Ah, well, love is involved there," he said. "Perhaps my judgment is biased. Love can have nothing but sympathy for lovers."

Annie's face lighted. "Oh, Tom, *do* write something about that," she implored him. "I don't think it has ever been quite brought out, but you can do it!"

"I can feel it," he told her, neatly. And she answered with passionate eyes.

When he tried to hedge with Helen Smith, it was just the same.

"I am sorry for the old man, though I can't help being out of patience with his poky ways," he said, with a worried look. "I wonder whether some sort of compromise isn't possible?"

"You are the kindest soul," cried Miss Smith, "and so fair-minded! I'm afraid I forget his side sometimes; but it's just as you said yesterday—when it's a question of the church or the individual, the individual must go to the wall." Tom did not remember that he was responsible for this remark, but it takes courage to deny the parentage of a fine sentiment; and, besides, it was true, and if he hadn't said it, he might have said it. So he agreed, warmly, that he believed Miss Smith was right; and went home to sit by poor, feverish Annie in a very miserable frame of mind. At least until he remembered to read her his sonnet upon "Love's Sympathy for Lovers." Annie drew such deep and beautiful meanings from it that Tom glowed with happiness.

He had not known how great he was.

IV

That the husband and wife should come to what is called "an understanding" on parish

matters was of course inevitable, and just for the first few minutes painful.

Some one happened to mention to Annie how pleased the new Smiths were with Tom's sympathy in the movement to get rid of Dr. Lavendar. Annie, exclaiming and denying, announced proudly Tom's fine allegiance to the old minister. Helen Smith was quoted, then appealed to (the bomb exploded at the meeting of the sewing society, so all the new people were on hand); and her assertion that Mr. Hastings had said "that Dr. Lavendar ought to resign," closed Annie's lips. She went home very white. There was a hard look in her face when she confronted Tom, and a curious sort of fright in her eyes. But it was over soon—Tom was hurt that he should have been misunderstood; he was amazed at the stupidity of the new people.

"Of course I wanted to help them," he said. "I told them I thought we might compromise in some way—"

"They said you proposed a compromise," she began.

"I told them," he said, with a mild scorn for his traducers, "that we must do the best for the church, not for individuals; we must not think of ourselves—"

Annie lifted her head. Her eyes were anxious, but they began to glow. Not think of ourselves: that was like Tom! "Yes," she said, "but they thought you meant—"

"Well," he interrupted, coldly, "I am not responsible for what they thought. But that *you*—Ah, well, never mind! I ought to have lived long enough not to concern myself with other people's thoughts."

She bit her lip; she was trembling to throw herself into his arms; her mind was alert to adjust the indirectness of the actual Tom with the frankness of the ideal Tom. "I see! I see!" she said, with passion; "it is your kindness to them, as well as to Dr. Lavendar, that they have misunderstood. Tom, you are noble! Oh, my dear, forgive me! You are so straightforward that you trust people; but you are so subtle and so just, in looking at every side, that they misunderstand you. I believe those people are temperamentally unable to understand any point of view not their own!"

She hung upon him, humble and exulting and entreating, all at once. By some curious process of love, she had draped beauty and honor upon her lay-figure, and was perfectly satisfied. As for Tom, he forgave her.

Annie's letter to Helen Smith in this connection was a masterpiece: she excused everybody; she blamed no one; she was tenderly jocose at "Tom's invincible desire to be just to both sides," which had led to Helen's "most natural mistake."

Tom, however, proposed that they should go away from Old Chester for a while. But Annie shook her head:

"I don't wonder you want to get away from it

all; you are a perfect thermometer, in your sensitiveness to anything mean! And I can imagine just how disgusted you are at the narrowness and literalness of these people. But, as you say, we must do the big thing; we must let them see just what our position is." Then Tom said, peremptorily, that he would not have anything more to do with the matter.

"I suppose I am too sensitive," he said, frowning, "but I do hate to be mixed up in such affairs." Annie did not urge him.

"After all, there is no use using razors to chop down trees. It needs a coarser fiber than you have, to deal with coarse-minded people."

Even Tom was a little startled by such an adjective in relation to the estimable Hayes, new Smiths, *et al.* But he did not discuss the matter; he only went about for two days, not taking much interest in his food, and looking a little sad and absent, and making Annie's heart ache over her own unkindness.

As for the side Tom had deserted, discussion raged; and Mr. Hastings, who was a thermometer of sensitiveness, was quick to feel the drop in the village temperature towards himself. But the domestic temperature was perhaps more deliciously warm than before; and as the autumn evenings began to close, dusk and crisp and full of the scent of fallen leaves, it was delightful to sit by the library fire, with Annie's hand in his, and read her his poems and listen to the meanings which

she discovered in them. She was very anxious that he should publish his verses; she said, in fact, that such publication would commit him to literature, and that was what she wanted. "Literature is your vocation, Tom. You must work for the world in books," she said; and then told him, her sweet eyes smiling at him in the firelight, that, also, she believed he could make money by writing. "You are superior to such a low motive, you old idealist," she said, gaily; "so I have to be the practical one, and remind you of it."

"Well, I suppose a successful book is a good thing, as far as money goes," he agreed; "I hadn't thought of that."

"Of course you hadn't!" she jeered. "A man whose sense of honor makes him fail in business would not be apt to think of it." She gave him an adoring look.

"Well," Tom confessed, "business is not my forte. I am so unfortunate as to have a conscience—which will keep us from ever being rich, I fear, my beloved. So perhaps you are right; perhaps I have got to do my work to raise humanity with my pen as a lever."

"*Work to raise humanity*," she repeated, her face growing serious. "Oh, Tom dear, when I see how you feel the responsibility of life, it makes me feel ashamed of my own little, selfish views. Yes; you must write! I only wish the people in Old Chester were in the least intellectual. It would be so good for you to have the stimulus of

some really vital thought. They are dears, you know, but they can't be called intellectual."

"Well, hardly," said Tom, smiling.

"The only person here with any mind to speak of," Annie said, thoughtfully, "is Judge Morrison. I have never liked him very much, he is so grim; but I must say he has a mind. I think even you would find him interesting; and intellectually he is away ahead of anybody in Old Chester. I think he would realize what you are, if he only knew you."

Tom said he thought that the Judge was a strong character. "What a forlorn life, though, for a scholarly man! No companion but that poor foolish old sister. Why don't you ask him to come to dinner some time, Annie? It would be only kind."

"It's like a school of ethics to live with a poet," Annie declared, laughing. "Of course I will ask him, but I should never have been nice enough to think of such a thing."

"Well, you mustn't talk to him about my poetry," Tom commanded, good-naturedly.

Annie laughed with joy, and told him he was a modest old goose; and certainly a part of her affectionate assertion was true. After that they were silent for a while, sitting there before the fire —Tom, who had a good digestion, reflecting upon the very good dinner which he had just eaten, and Annie thinking of Judge Morrison. After all, it would be a good thing to invite him;

he would be sure to appreciate Tom; and though Judge Morrison was not loved in Old Chester, he was respected, so his good opinion was not to be despised. Alas! poor Annie had been forced to admit that since Tom had backed and filled about Dr. Lavendar, Old Chester was certainly colder towards him.

"I feel it," he told her. "I am as sensitive as a thermometer to coldness."

"Don't mind it; they are not worth minding," Annie had said, angrily. But Tom did mind it, and so he became more smiling and cordial and flattering than ever.

"Oh, if he only wouldn't be so *pleasant!*" Gertrude Mack confided to her mother. "Why can't he be just polite, like other people? But he is so disgustingly pleasant!" Annie did not, of course, have an idea of any such unreasonableness; but she knew that Old Chester—poor, narrow-minded, stupid Old Chester! did not appreciate Tom; and as it looked as though they would have to spend the winter there (Tom's exigent conscience still preventing him from securing any business position), it was certainly desirable that some one should make people see what manner of man they were ignoring. "When they *know* him!" she thought, passionately; and said to herself something about "entertaining angels unawares." From which it will be seen that she was very far gone. Why Judge Morrison should be more apt to recognize angels than other folks Annie did not

say; but she believed it would be well to cultivate him. So the invitation was sent and accepted, and the Judge came.

The host, whose geniality was always aggressive, and the hostess, who felt all the emotion of a good deed, were bubbling over with kindness. The Judge made himself agreeable, and never showed his fangs in one of his wicked old laughs. But how he watched them!

Annie found him a most attentive and courteous listener when she talked about her husband —or tried to make him talk about himself.

"I want him to write a book, Judge Morrison," she said.

"Well, you will have to keep him up to his duties, Mrs. Hastings," the Judge declared. "Literary men are lazy, you know." The allusion gave Annie her opportunity, and in she rushed where angels might well have feared to tread.

"Tom isn't lazy; indeed, he insists," she complained, gaily, "upon writing all the morning, instead of entertaining me. He has just finished a most beautiful thing. I wish he would read it to you. (Now, Tom, be quiet! I *will* speak of it.) He's perfectly absurd, Judge Morrison; he won't let me talk about his poems."

Of course the Judge deprecated such modesty— "Unless the poems are too deep for the casual listener?"

"Oh, no, no!" Tom protested, kindly; "not at all, I'm sure."

"When did you first publish?" the Judge said, meditatively. "Let me see—the 'Epithalamium' is in a collection I have, but I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten the date; you must have been quite young, and—"

Annie and Tom were both exclaiming; but Theophilus Morrison went on, with the greatest urbanity:

"Have you not a volume of your husband's poems at hand, Mrs. Hastings?"

The protest that Tom had not published a book ("*would* not publish a book," Annie put it), caused the guest great surprise—"and regret as well. Still, you cannot escape fame, Mr. Hastings. Your 'Epithalamium,' in the collection of which I spoke, is a proof of it. Or is it a case of infringement of copyright? Come, come, that is in my dry-as-dust line. We poor lawyers have no poetry in us, but the excuse for our existence is to protect the rights of you unpractical poets."

Annie was greatly excited. "Tom, somebody has stolen the 'Epithalamium'! No, Judge Morrison, it was never printed. My husband has a peculiar reticence and reserve about such things. (Tom, I *will* speak!) I hope he is going to publish a book this winter, but he has always been absurdly modest about his literary work. You see, it is quite evident that some wretched person has stolen it. What is the collection? How did the thief get hold of it? Perhaps the satin sheet

was stolen from some one who came to the wedding—oh, what a wretch!"

Annie's eyes shone with anger, and she breathed tremulously. Tom frowned and protested: "Don't, Annie; I beg of you! I don't mind in the least—"

"*I* mind!" Annie said, valiantly. "Judge Morrison, tell me the name of the collection, please. Has it just been published?"

"No; oh no!" the Judge said. "I really didn't observe the date. It seemed rather an old book, but I did not look for the date."

Annie's wrath collapsed. "Oh, then it can't be. Tom only wrote it, you know, last summer."

"Really?" the Judge said, looking puzzled. "Ah, well, perhaps I am mistaken; but I'll send you the little volume, and—"

"No, no!" his host insisted. "Please don't think of taking so much trouble. It isn't of the slightest importance, I assure you. Pray don't—"

"Oh, no trouble at all, Mr. Hastings. Delighted to be of service to Mrs. Hastings. So long as it is not plagiarism, she will be entertained by my mistake."

He was so agreeable for the rest of the evening that Annie said afterwards it only showed the effect of kindness, even on a crabbed, hard nature like his. "How he blossomed out!" she said, when the door closed on the Judge. "Poor old dear! It has done him good. How lovely it was in you to think of it, Tom!"

Tom was silent for a moment, and then said,

sharply, that he wished that that woman of Annie's, in the kitchen, wouldn't spoil her soups by putting so much wine in them. "Might as well drink cooking-sherry at once as take her clear soup."

Annie looked at him in astonishment; why should he call the cook "hers" in that way? (Annie had not been married long enough to know that the cook is always "hers" when the dinner is not good.) Tom was evidently displeased, which was unlike him. She lay awake thinking about it a good while, troubled and perplexed, trying to adjust bad temper to a noble soul. She was not at all hurt; she was so sure that there was some good reason behind the unreasonable words; and by and by, in a flash, she found it, and laughed a little, silently, to herself:—Tom had felt slighted because she had talked too much to the Judge! He had missed their tranquil, tender evening by the fireside. He was not jealous—of course not; jealousy is stupid and ignoble—but he had certainly felt slighted. She smiled to herself, with a warm glow in her heart, and leaned over and kissed him. "You old stupid," she said to herself, "as if he, or any other man, is good enough to black your boots!"

V

Of course the little battered copy of *The Bride* was a bombshell. As for the explosion, there is no use going into that; it is too unpleasant.

When husbands and wives fall out, the best thing the bystanders can do is to put their fingers in their ears and look for a door—a mouse-hole!

In this instance, when the first bang and crash were over, two white and terrified people looked at each other, and each believed that, so far as their happiness was concerned, the end of the world had come.

"Don't you see?" Annie said, in a low voice. "It means, I did not marry—*you*."

"Ah, my wife," Tom stammered, "must you always misjudge me—I, who would die for your happiness?" He tried, poor fellow, to assume his grand manner, but all in vain; he was like a drenched and dripping rooster, trying to crow in the rain. "I—I think you are rather mean, Annie, to accuse me in this way."

Well! well! What was going to become of them? Annie's ideal had suddenly shifted and revealed the reality. The drapery of truth and nobility, the cloth of golden honor, the jewels of poetic thought, slipped off—and there was the poor, lean, jointed wooden figure on which all these fine things had been draped!

"You are not *true*. You were not true about Dr. Lavendar; I see that now. It's part of the same thing. I think perhaps you are—a coward. It isn't that I care that you didn't write the poem; it is that you are not—you." Then she went away and shut herself up in her room.

Tom roved about, wretched, hungry (for to eat at such a moment would have been an artistic insult to the situation), and really frightened. Besides, he was very unhappy. There is nothing which is such killing pain as to realize that one who loves us is unjust to us; and in his timid mind Tom Hastings knew that his wife was unjust to him. For, when you come to think of it, is there anything more unjust than to build gold and brass and iron on poor, well-meaning clay,—and then blame the clay when the whole image falls into dust? To be sure, Tom did not know he was clay; but he suffered, all the same, at the injustice which was done him.

When Annie, in her own room, shut her door upon her husband, she stood leaning against it, shivering and bewildered.

. . . Tom had not written the "Epithalamium"; he had not been straightforward about Dr. Lavendar. . . . A multitude of shadowy deceits began to close in upon her—a sentence twisted to some other than its obvious meaning—an assent that was explained as a dissent. . . .

Annie put her hands up to her head and tried to steady herself, for indeed it seemed as though the earth moved under her feet. Her husband was noble, he was loyal, he was an idealist with the purest moral perceptions, and—*he had lied.* How was she going to adjust these things? They must be adjusted, or else—

She walked restlessly about the room, twisting

her hands nervously together. "What am I going to do?" she kept saying to herself. She stopped once at her desk, and picked up a letter and glanced at it with absent eyes; it was from the "poor Smiths'" girl, who was "studying art" on the inspiration of Annie's belief in her: "Did Mrs. Hastings think she had best take a course, now, in this, or that, or the other?" Annie turned the letter over and looked at the date; it was nearly a month old, and was still unanswered. "Why *should* he have deceived me?" she said to herself; "what was the object?" Even as she read the letter, it slipped from her mind and was again forgotten.

That was a very bad day for Annie. Tom knocked once at the door, and she said, in a muffled voice, "Go away, please," and poor Tom went down-stairs miserably; and looking to the right and left, and seeing no worshiper, took a good two fingers of whisky, after which he was temporarily cheered. But another day passed; still Annie kept to herself. By that time Tom was thoroughly scared. So he made up his mind to go and see Dr. Lavendar. Advice he had to have; this kind of thing couldn't go on.

He went that night. Dr. Lavendar was not at home; and Tom, looking lantern-jawed and sunken-eyed, sat and waited for him. The waiting made him more and more nervous; and poor Tom, being the kind of man who expresses his emotion by tears (and is thought the better of

by ladies on account of his "fineness"), was tremulously near weeping. Perhaps it was as well, for it made him quicker to leave his high horse and come down to facts. He was a little jaunty at first with the old clergyman, a little inclined to be indirect, but he was too genuinely miserable to keep it up long.

"Women are so sweetly unreasonable sometimes," he began, "and though Annie is the most charming of her sex, she is a woman, you know. The fact is she is a bit offended at me, and I really think I'll have to call you in as a mediator, Dr. Lavendar."

"Ho!" said Dr. Lavendar. "Take a pipe, man, and don't fash yourself. Mediator? Do you want me to put my head between the upper and nether millstones?"

Tom smiled feebly. "Annie is terribly offended at me," he said, his chin quivering; "I don't know what to do."

The old clergyman looked at him gravely. "Do ye deserve it?" he said.

Tom, summoning a pleasantly jocose air, smiled, and protested that he supposed nobody was perfect; and perhaps he—well, Dr. Lavendar knew that to be great was to be misunderstood!

"The fact is, Annie has misunderstood me in a little matter."

"So you're great, are you?" the old man said, good-humoredly.

"Oh, well, never mind that," Tom answered, serious and anxious, yet speaking kindly.

Dr. Lavendar took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at him.

"Well, well!" he said.

"Yes," Tom went on, his face clouding; "it all came out of a misunderstanding; but Annie has made herself very unhappy over it—and I would die rather than cause Annie any unhappiness. What is my life good for but to make her happy?"

The clergyman was silent.

"The fact is—well, I hardly know how to tell you"—Mr. Hastings' embarrassment made his face red—"it is so absurd. Such a tempest in a teapot! and it has all grown out of a bit of forgetfulness on my part. I never supposed that she was so—absurd!" An edge of irritation broke through his embarrassment and helped him on in his explanation. Dr. Lavendar did not help him at all.

"You see, the way it was—you know, of course, that I write poetry? Well, things strike me in very original ways sometimes (of course my poems are entirely original); but just before I was married I came across some verses on marriage—a marriage ode, so to speak—they are called epithalamiums," he explained, kindly;—"and I copied it for Annie, making a few changes, just to make it more apt, so to speak. I was so pressed for time just then that I couldn't write a proper

one, as I meant to. I was going to tell Annie how I had copied it for her, but she unfortunately found it in my note-book, and, very foolishly, supposed it was mine. I'm sure, if I couldn't write better poetry than that I should give up literature! Well, the awkward thing was that before I knew it she had shown it to two or three people. Of course when she told me I was very much annoyed. I knew it would embarrass her to explain to people that she'd made a mistake, don't you know?—especially as she had actually gone and had the thing printed on satin without saying anything to me about it. You see, it really was very awkward."

Dr. Lavendar nodded. "It was awkward."

"Of course I meant to explain as soon as I got the chance; but she was always talking about it and praising it—it seemed as if I never could get the chance! I hope I don't need to tell you I meant to explain? But I overlooked it; or, rather, I never seemed to find the right moment. *You* understand?" he ended, in that warm, intimate tone which almost always moved women, but had a curiously irritating effect on men.

"I can't say that I do," Dr. Lavendar said; "it merely seems to me that you deceived your wife."

"Deceived!" Tom said, hotly. "I don't see how you make that out! I was careless, I admit; but isn't everybody careless once in a while? As for deceiving her—well, I don't pretend to be a

great poet, but I must say, if I couldn't do better than that thing—! No; it was merely a matter of opportunity. I intended to explain it to her, but she was always telling me how beautiful it was, and all that, and—"

"Is there anything else?" Dr. Lavendar interrupted him.

"Well, this confounded parish misunderstanding," Mr. Hastings said, angrily; "she's brought that up again. I swear, Dr. Lavendar, women are—"

"What parish misunderstanding?"

"Well—why, you know—" Tom began, but suddenly floundered. "Oh, well, the Smiths and those people are fussing over some trouble, and I think they misunderstood my attitude slightly; of course I feel, with Annie, the warmest regard—but—well, Annie doesn't seem to understand, and—"

"What is the parish trouble?" the old minister said. "I don't know of any parish trouble. What do you mean?"

"Oh, some nonsense the new people have been talking," Tom answered, hastily. "But Annie couldn't see why I didn't say all I thought to everybody. She can't understand that reserve which is the characteristic of the artistic temperament. And justice. I am a very fair-minded man, Dr. Lavendar; I can see the new people's side, and I can see the other side. And I listen to both sides."

"That's fair; that's fair."

"Yes," Tom agreed, warmly; "I think that, whatever else I may be, I am fair. I am a perfect thermometer in my sensitiveness to anything like injustice; so I was willing to hear both sides. But Annie feels now that I didn't make my opinions clear. But I couldn't be responsible for other people's stupidity!" he ended, impatiently.

"Annie seems to think, then, that your opinion on this matter, whatever it is, is important?" Dr. Lavendar said.

"Well, yes, she does. I think she exaggerates it a little; in fact"—he dropped into his confidential and intimate tone—"I tell her she thinks too well of me."

"I suppose that's the whole trouble," Dr. Lavendar said, ruminatingly.

Tom hesitated, not quite catching the sense of the remark. "The trouble? Well, it's just the feminine inability to grasp the masculine attitude towards things. Annie is temperamentally unable to understand any point of view not her own."

"Ho!" said Dr. Lavendar.

"But what in the world am I going to do?" the anxious husband went on. "Why—Dr. Lavendar, she—she *won't see me!*" He fairly broke down at that, and fumbled in his pockets in a way that made Dr. Lavendar say, "Here! take mine," and pretend not to see him.

Tom mopped his eyes, and Dr. Lavendar got up; he took his pipe out of his mouth, and filled it slowly, stuffing the tobacco down into the bowl with his stubborn old thumb; then he lighted it, pulled his coat-tails forward under his arms, and thrust his hands down into his pockets.

"Well, sir, as I understand it, Annie has a very high opinion of you?"

"Dr. Lavendar," Tom said, earnestly, "don't think I am finding fault with my wife for lack of appreciation. I am perfectly ready to admit that she means to be appreciative. It is only that—that she can't seem to see—" His voice trailed off miserably.

"She thinks you are a fine fellow?" the old clergyman said, with a keen look.

Tom looked modest.

"When she's told you so, you let it pass, didn't you?"

"Oh, well, of course, I am always telling her she thinks too well of me—"

"And when you tell her she thinks too well of you, she tells you that you are too humble? Hey? doesn't she?"

"Well, yes," Tom admitted.

"And the more you protest, the better she thinks of you? And when you want cakes and ale, she thinks you ask for virtue?"

Tom drew his handsome brows together in a puzzled way. "I'm a perfectly abstemious man—"

"Ha!" said Dr. Lavendar. "Well, well; that's a point in your favor, I'm sure. I suppose, now, Hastings, you always try to see what Annie likes or approves, and you like and approve it, too? To please her, you know?"

"Yes"; Tom agreed, eagerly, "I've always done everything I could to please her; and it's a little unkind that she can't trust me now."

"Annie is rather taken up with philanthropy nowadays," Dr. Lavendar said, thoughtfully, "and I think I've heard you talk a little about it?"

"Oh yes," Tom agreed, absently; and added something about "working for humanity," but Dr. Lavendar did not notice it.

"You've been interested in all her projects, haven't you? You've been sympathetic about Esther Smith's career, when perhaps the rest of us have been rather cross about it? I don't believe you ever told her you were tired of Esther? Well, that's been very pleasant for Annie; I'm sure of that—I'm sure of that!"

Tom began to brighten up. "I'm glad you see my side of it, sir."

"I suppose you never told your wife a story that wasn't just fit for a lady's ears?" Dr. Lavendar went on, putting his pipe into the other corner of his mouth, and nodding his white head.

"I'm sure I hope not," Tom answered, warmly.

"Well, why not?" Dr. Lavendar inquired. Mr. Hastings looked at him in astonishment.

"Why, Annie wouldn't like it!"

"I suppose you know one or two, though?" the minister said. Tom's face dropped into sudden lines of mean mirth.

"Well, I could tell you—" he began.

"You needn't," Dr. Lavendar broke in. "I knew you had some on hand. Well, now, you haven't stayed away from church on Sundays, because Annie wouldn't like you to?"

"No, she wouldn't like it," Tom agreed; "not but what I'm delighted to hear you preach, sir."

"Yes, yes, of course," the clergyman said, and was silent for a moment.

"You see," Tom said, "it's just what I told you—I've done everything to please her."

"I believe you have," said Dr. Lavendar—"I believe you have." He paused, and looked at Tom, drawing his lips in, and frowning. "Mr. Hastings, do you want me to tell you the whole trouble?"

"I wish you would," Tom said, in a dispirited way. "As you see, I've left nothing undone to please Annie, yet just see how she treats me!"

"Well," the minister began, slowly, "she's the one to blame."

"I knew you'd say that," Tom said, eagerly.

"She's entirely to blame. And there's only one way to set this matter right—tell her so."

"Well, doesn't that seem a little severe?" Tom remonstrated, hopefully. "You know I *was* for-

getful. I didn't remember to explain the—the accident about the epithalamium."

"I wouldn't go into that, if I were you," Dr. Lavendar said, mildly. "I'd go home and face her with her own fault. I tell you, man, if you can do it, there's hope for you both; if you can't, I'm afraid there are darker days ahead of you."

"You think I ought to show her how unreasonable she is?"

"I think you ought to go and stand up like a man and say to her: 'Look here; this has got to stop, this foolish and wicked business. Now listen to me,'—this is what I'd say, you know:—'Listen to me; you are a cruel and unscrupulous woman—'"

"Oh, well, but," Tom interrupted, "she doesn't mean to be cruel. I think she—"

"Listen, sir! you can do as you choose; but I tell you this is the only way *I* see out of your difficulty. 'You are a cruel and unscrupulous and selfish woman' (you'll say). 'You have chosen to believe that I amount to something. You have made up your mind that I am a fine fellow. Now listen to me—*I'm not.* I'm a shallow, untruthful, cowardly man, and I won't have you pushing me up on a pedestal where I don't belong.' Hastings, if you can say that to her," (Tom sat looking at him, open-mouthed)—"if you can tell her that never for a moment since she married you has she let you be yourself—if you can tell her that she is a thief, that she has stolen your littleness, and your meanness, your badness,

for that matter; and left you a poor, miserable, cowardly sneak, walking about in her petticoats, speaking her thoughts, and living her goodness, (for Annie *is* a good child);—if you can make her see this, why, bless my heart, man, you'll save both of you! The fault in this matter is not yours, it's hers."

Tom Hastings rose, white and speechless. Dr. Lavendar came and put his hand on his shoulder, his keen old eyes kind and anxious.

"Hastings, my dear fellow, look here; can't you be yourself? Annie will love you better; she'll love *you*, not herself, which is what she loves now. And we'll all be fond of you. And—it will be a relief to you. You know it will. Man to man, tell me, now, aren't you tired of it sometimes—this business of being on a pedestal?"

"Damn it!" the other said, choking, "I—I am!"

Dr. Lavendar took Tom's big, meaningless hand in his kind grip.

"God bless you, my boy! Go now, and be as bad as you want to be. It will save you both—I believe it will save you both!"

Tom went. Dr. Lavendar watched him hurrying off through the dusk, and shook his white head sadly.

Did Mr. Hastings take Dr. Lavendar's advice? If he did, he never came back and told the old man. And he certainly did not blossom out into crime. But there must have been some kind of

reconciliation patched up. Annie must have arranged that lie somehow. Just how she did it is not important, I suppose. How do we all fit facts to our ideals? We keep our respect for our tippling husbands by saying that the fault is only the virtue of good-fellowship gone to seed. We occasionally (more rarely) continue fond of our whining, fussing wives by assuring ourselves that the nagging and worrying spring from deep devotion to ourselves. Well! So it goes. Annie must have reconciled her heart and head in some sort of way. Perhaps she called the lie a fib? Perhaps she blamed herself for not having given Tom the opportunity to explain? Perhaps she even exalted him into a martyr, by saying to herself that he had borne this accident of deceit on his most sensitive conscience so as to spare her the mortification of realizing her mistake. Love is capable of looking at facts in this cross-eyed way!

But some adjustment must have been made; for when the Hastings gave up their house and went away to Mercer to live, Annie told Gertrude Mack that she was heavenly happy—she didn't believe any woman had ever been so happy! ("One would have thought, to hear her," Gertrude told Helen Smith, "that Annie had discovered matrimony!") And then she said that on the whole she believed the new people were right, and Dr. Lavendar *was* too old to preach any longer.

"Besides," she said, "he is dreadfully narrow, and perfectly incapable of understanding a sensitive and imaginative nature. And you know that sort of man can do infinite harm!"

A remark which might cause a thoughtful person to wonder what account Tom had given her of his interview with the old minister.

MISS CLARA'S PERSEUS

MISS CLARA'S PERSEUS

I

ONCE in a while a human creature is born a Friend, just as every dog is born a friend, or as ordinary people are born butchers, or housekeepers, or artists. For one born friend (who is not a dog) there are, of course, hundreds of the rest of us who are born—just anything. Considering, then, the rareness of the species, it is a little remarkable that Old Chester should have had one of these beings within its borders. There were many friendly folk in Old Chester; there were many friends, even; but there was only one Clara Hale!

Miss Ellen Bailey's school-girls were brought up on the ideal of friendship as exemplified by Miss Clara. But it was during our last year—the year before Miss Ellen got married and the school closed—that that which had been a tradition of the past suddenly became a feature of the present; the old and wonderful friendship, supposed to be dead, came to life! It took shape before our very eyes, and all Miss Ellen's girls

gaped with sympathetic sentimentality. That Miss Clara Hale had been a good daughter for many sad years was as nothing to us, in comparison with the fact that she had been a good friend "ever since she was born"!

For she and Fanny Morrison began to be friends in their cradles, so their mothers said. When they got into short clothes they learned their letters first with one mother and then with the other; and by and by they progressed, still side by side at one or the other maternal knee, to *Reading Without Tears*, and, like the two gilt cherubs on the brown cover, they read out of the same book, in big black type (which it makes my head ache now to think of), "o-x, ox; a-x, ax." When they began to go to school (this was before Miss Ellen's day, of course) they came together, and sat together, and went home with their arms about each other's waists. Their hair-ribbons were just alike, they both had Campbell-plaid best dresses, and each possessed a "treasure-trunk"—a doll's trunk in which they kept precious keepsakes of each other. It was said they had never squabbled. We, observing Miss Clara now, thirty years later, quite understood this; how could anybody quarrel with this silent angel with the vaguely lovely face? We always thought of Miss Clara when people talked about angels. Certainly Fanny Morrison would have been simply a fiend if she had squabbled with Miss Clara!

"*She* never said a cross word to *any* one," Mary Dilworth said once, looking significantly at her bosom friend; "much less to Fanny."

"Well, I wouldn't, either, if you were an angel like her," the bosom friend retorted.

"I wish she had got married, though," some one sighed; "she'd have made such a beautiful bride."

Here was another wonderful thing about Miss Clara: she could have got married, *and she didn't!* "He," as Miss Ellen's girls called him, had been as devoted to her as she was to her Friend. But to think that a young lady could have had a veil, and white slippers, and the third finger of her left glove ripped, so that the ring could be put on, and, oh, everything!—and wouldn't! It was unbelievable. But we knew it was true, because here was Mr. Oliver Ormsby still hanging around like a faithful dog (of course "faithful dog" is tautology, but we didn't know that); in fact, Miss Clara could be married even now, old as she was—and she still "wouldn't."

"Not that I blame her," Mary Dilworth hastened to add; "just look at him!"

We liked Mr. Ormsby; he always had "kisses" in his pocket which he shared with any young person he might meet; but he was not beautiful to look at,—poor Mr. Oliver! He was roly-poly, and bald, and had red side whiskers; and he wasn't as tall as Miss Clara. Imagine walking up the aisle, and looking down at a bald head!

Oh no; she couldn't have married him when she was young, and certainly not now when she was old. "My mother says she's forty-four," Mary announced. We knew exactly how old the angel was, but we always gasped when her age was mentioned.

"Forty-four! Oh, do you think she will die soon?" some one asked, apprehensively,—which moved at least one girl to tears.

According to tradition, this wonderful friendship, unbroken by a squabble, went on until a most dreadful thing happened—the Morrisons went out West to live. Probably the older people would have called the reason of that removal to the West dreadful, but it was the moving itself which was so appalling to Old Chester youth—for it separated the Friends! As for the reason, the eldest Morrison boy got sick, and his father and mother took it into their heads that they ought to live in California; so they packed up and left Old Chester at a month's notice. They never thought of Fanny's feelings at being torn from Miss Clara! Fathers and mothers are very cruel about such things. The two girls were about fourteen when this happened. During those weeks before the crash of departure, the impetuous Fanny cried and raged, and Clara's smooth forehead, so full and pure and girlish, gathered lines that never left it. She used to come over to Fanny's house, and creep up to her room to sit beside her in absolute silence. Some-

times she held Fanny's hand, sometimes kissed it, sometimes quickly and furtively touched her lips to the older girl's shoulder, or even to her skirt. Fanny talked vehemently all the time, not pausing even while she straightened Clara's hair-ribbon or fastened a hook and eye on her waist. "Of course I'm sorry Freddy is sick; but I don't see the slightest use of going away. . . . Oh, you are a dear untidy thing, Clara! . . . I guess Pennsylvania 'air' is as good as any in California! . . . I'll just simply *die* without you, Clara! Here—let me pin your collar. Simply die!" This last, over and over.

In answer, Clara, very pale, would press Fanny's dimpled hand against her young bosom, then kiss each individual finger. She rarely said more than, "Oh, Fanny."

But Fanny did not need any response; in fact, she would not have heard it in the torrent of her own words: "I'll miss you every minute. I'll think of you every minute. We'll write to each other every day!"

"Every day."

"And I'll tell you every single thought I have, and every single thing I do. Oh, Clara, how cruel they are to drag me out there, away from you! I don't see why they couldn't take poor Freddy and leave me here!"

As the day of separation came nearer Fanny suggested that they should run away together; and, while Clara looked on, haggard and speech-

less, she broke open her savings-bank to see if she could finance the scheme.

However, the three dollars and sixty-two cents on deposit put an end to this project. Instead of running away they vowed and vowed and vowed again eternal, unchangeable friendship, and letters every day. The night before the Morrisons left Old Chester was one of real agony to the two little creatures. They were so miserable that the poor Morrison father and mother actually had a glimmer of amusement in the midst of their melancholy preoccupation of anxiety. Fanny went around with a parboiled face of tears and snuffles. She was a perfect nuisance—when everybody was so engrossed in packing up, and trying to remember this and settle that, and say good-by to all Old Chester! It was a relief, Mrs. Morrison said, to get the poor child, with her sobs and sulks, out of the way for a while; so no one called her back when, in the May dusk, Fanny slipped down to the gate to meet Clara. There, under the shadows of a great hedge of blossoming laburnum, they took their last farewells. Fanny, freckled, voluble, her honest, good-humored face streaming with tears; Clara, white, silent, and entirely dry-eyed. They flew into each other's arms, and Fanny sobbed loudly.

"I shall never get married," she said; "I decided that this afternoon. I told mother to-day. I said, 'Mother, I shall never, never, never get married!' And what do you suppose mother said?

She said, 'Perhaps no one will ask you.' I said, 'I should consider it unfaithful to Clara even to be asked!' And I would. No, I shall never marry. As soon as I am allowed to do what I please I shall come back to you. I told mother so. I said, 'Mother, as soon as I can do what I please I shall go back to Clara.' You won't get married, either, will you, Clara?"

"No."

They sat down in the grass, Clara holding one of Fanny's curls against her lips, listening for the thousandth time to vows of enduring love. Suddenly Fanny stopped short in the middle of a sentence:

"I will nev— Clara! Let's sign it in our blood!"

"Sign—what?"

"That we will always, always love each other! I told mother at dinner that I would always love you, and she said, '*Always* is a long word.' I said, 'Well, mother, I've vowed.' She just laughed. Oh, aren't they cruel? Grown-up people don't understand love; at any rate, mothers don't. Let's vow, and sign it—"

Clara broke in, in a passionate whisper, "*Yes.*"

Fanny jumped to her feet. "I'll tear back to the house and get paper and a pencil; if they haven't gone and packed every single blessed th—" Her voice was lost in the sound of her flying steps.

Alone in the shadow of the laburnums, in the

fragrant twilight, Clara put her face down in the grass and moaned: "She's going away. She's going away. She's going away." She was still lying there when Fanny came running down the path.

"It was hard work to get the things! Just as I said! They'd gone and packed up everything! I told mother at supper,—I said, 'Why pack ev—' But I tore two pages out of the back of my speller, one for you and one for me. And"—her breathless voice fell and thrilled—"*here is a pin.*"

"A pin?" Clara said, bewildered.

"To prick our fingers. But we must write out the vow first"—she had brought a pen for the signatures, but a pencil for the oath—"because," she explained, practically, "all those words would take too much blood."

The vow was quickly decided upon and written in lead-pencil in a round, pot-hook hand on each of the blank pages rifled from the spelling-book:

I promise to love { *Fanny* / *Clara* } *all my life.*

"We'll sign right under it," Fanny commanded. Her face was alert with interest, and her poor little swollen nose was distinctly less red. "Give me the pin!" she said, solemnly; then squealed, dropped the pin, and put her finger in her mouth. "We'd better get red ink," she mumbled. "Isn't there some red ink at your house?"

Clara, on her knees in the grass, feeling for the pin, broke in: "No. It must be in our blood. Here it is," she said, and got on her feet, holding the pin in a steady hand. Then her breath caught, and a red drop welled up on the tip of her left forefinger; but she did not utter a sound. She took the pen hurriedly so as not to lose the living ink, and holding the page of the spelling-book against the gate-post, and straining her eyes in the gathering darkness, she traced her name below the impassioned words.

"Don't let's sign our last names; mine is so long," said Fanny.

But Clara's scarlet "Hale" was already written.

"It's stopped bleeding," said Fanny, ruefully, looking at her finger.

"Mine hasn't," Clara said; "take my blood."

Fanny, who had a real sense of fitness, hesitated, sighed, and squeezed her finger. "I can't make it bleed any more," she said; "well—" She dipped the pen into the rapidly drying drop on Clara's finger and scrawled a faint "Fanny Morr—" There was no more ink! "Well, never mind," she said; "that's enough. Now you give me your vow and I'll give you mine."

The exchange was made, but Clara kissed her scrap of paper before she handed it over to Fanny.

"You put my vow in your treasure-trunk, and I'll put yours in mine," Fanny said.

Clara nodded. She was beyond words.

The story of the final rending apart was almost

more than Miss Ellen's girls could bear, although the grown people used to laugh, all these years afterwards, when they talked about it! Miss Ellen's girls never laughed. Each of us wished we knew a girl worthy to be a Fanny to our Clara, for no girl doubted that she could be a Clara—jabbing that pin right down into her finger and, "with the blood streaming all over the grass," write the full name, even if it did have nine letters in it!

Well, then, at last the Morrison family were gone. . . . Mrs. Hale said she was glad to get the thing over; now, perhaps, Clara would eat her meals like a sensible child.

"Wasn't it just like a girl's mother, to say a thing like that?" Miss Ellen's pupils said; "and of course she *didn't* eat; look how thin she is!"

As for what happened after the actual tragedy of parting, that wasn't so interesting. It leaked out, somehow (until poor Mrs. Hale was stricken with paralysis, Old Chester never lacked for information), it leaked out that on Fanny's side the correspondence soon flagged. Her letters, like those of most talkative persons, were infrequent and laconic; in a month the "daily" letter became a weekly one; in half a year it arrived once in eight or ten weeks. But Clara kept up her end of the correspondence with disconcerting punctuality. She used to reply to Fanny's brief missives almost in the same hour in which they were received, and at great length—inarticulate

people often have voluble pens; then a week later she would write again, and perhaps yet again, before a response came. The epistolary flame flared up once, when the girls were about twenty, because Fanny had a lover. For some months before her marriage she shared with Clara her ecstasies about her Mr. Herbert. In the reflected glow of young love, Clara expanded like a slowly opening white lily. She began about this time to have a lover herself—fat, good, sandy-haired young Oliver Ormsby, who played on the flute, sucked "kisses," and read every novel he could lay his hands on. But Miss Clara was unresponsive to her own romance. When she looked at Oliver her soft eye was as cool as a mountain spring; all the passion she possessed was given to Fanny's passion. When Fanny's baby boy was born—and named Hale, after Clara—Clara brooded over the news as a bird might brood over its own empty nest, and again the old correspondence revived. But it was one-sided, for Fanny was too busy to answer more than one letter in five. By the time the friends were twenty-six or seven the letters were only rather long Christmas and birthday notes from Clara, with an occasional acknowledgment from Fanny.

Then all communication ceased. This was the year that Mrs. Hale was taken ill. After that, with the most faithful intentions in the world, Clara had no time even for birthday notes. She

was not a very capable person, and the nursing of her mother left her time only for her birdlike meals and an occasional Sunday-morning service. Once a rumor reached Old Chester that Fanny's husband was dead, and then Clara did write; but her words of sympathy came back to her through the dead-letter office. That was the end. She did not write again. Probably Fanny Morrison—Herbert, rather—hardly noticed the cessation of the letters. It was all she could do—poor, good-natured, impulsive, sensible woman! —to fight the realities of breavement and poverty.

To Clara, in the back-water of a sick-room, the gradual ending of the friendship was not, perhaps, an acute unhappiness; it was rather a dully aching regret. Although she did not know it, part of the regret was for the loss of an interest —the only interest in her life, except her mother. Mrs. Hale was her tender but pathetically monotonous occupation. In those years of slowly increasing helplessness, Clara, with the aid of her deaf old Maggie, took entire care of the invalid. It was a patiently sad task, devoid of interest because devoid of hope, and, to any extent, of distress, for Mrs. Hale did not suffer. Clara and Maggie did what they could for her body; and for her mind, her daughter read aloud to her for hours every day. She did this even when the time came that she could not tell whether or not her mother heard her. What this meant of persistency of purpose during the last year or two of dumb,

blind, apparently deaf helplessness, can be imagined. Not the flicker of an eyelid or the pressure of a finger showed whether Mrs. Hale could understand, or even hear, the newspaper or Bible or novel, which, with slow, painfully distinct enunciation, week after week, month after month, Clara read to her. It was so mechanical that often this faithful daughter did not know what she read; her mind drowsed in the gently dulling flow of her own voice. Her dutifulness (faithfully reported by Oliver) was the wonder and admiration of Old Chester; but no one realized how, little by little, in the silent house, with the silent woman on the bed, and the almost equally silent old servant down-stairs, Clara—traveling this narrow path of duty where no temptation held out a warm, alluring hand, and where the hedge of habit hid the wider fields of other people's hopes and joys and sorrows—grew narrow, too, and emotionally sterile. Her serenity seemed to those who looked on, and thought of the burden she bore, a sign of saintliness—"or stupidity," Oliver Ormsby's mother said, "which is the same thing."

"What! What!" said Old Chester, horrified.

"Saints are dreffful narrow-minded," Mrs. Ormsby explained; "and narrow people are stupid, and stupid people make me cross!"

Martha King took pains to repeat to the old lady Dr. Lavendar's comment on this remark. "Because," said Mrs. King, "that's one thing

about me; I may not be perfect, but I am frank. . . . Dr. Lavendar said no one could call *you* saintly," Martha said, gravely.

Old Mrs. Ormsby made a fine courtesy. "He compliments me!" she said.

As for that reading aloud, when asked about it, Clara said, briefly, "Yes, I read."

"Does she understand?"

"I don't know."

"But why—"

"Oh," Clara said, "if there is even a chance that she understands—"

"Clara, you are an angel!" Oliver Ormsby would say. "I wish you would let me help you; I could read to her sometimes."

"You do help me; you bring me books."

"I could do more than that if you would only marry me," he pleaded.

Clara, growing pale and then red, said, faintly, "Oh, now, Oliver, *please!*"

Oliver was silent. After years of semiannual offers of marriage he did not press his proposals; in fact, they were a little casual: "Don't you think you care enough for me, now, Clara, to marry me?" or, "I wish you felt like marrying me, dear!" or, "That chimney of yours is smoking pretty badly; if we were only married I could look after the house better than I do."

"It's queer she doesn't take him," Old Chester said, observing his faithfulness.

"She has no idea of taking him!" Mrs. Ormsby

said, resentfully; "she just keeps him hanging on."

He had hung on for twenty years. In the days when Miss Ellen's girls paid him the tautological compliment, what there was left of his sandy hair was getting gray around the temples. He had a quiet humor of his own that kept him from being embittered by what his mother, in moments of displeased confidence to Old Chester, called Clara Hale's "selfishness"; and with his humor was a fine sort of courage that made him willing to be ridiculous. It takes more courage to be deliberately ridiculous than to be either good or bad, and a man is a little ridiculous who, as Mr. Mack said, "runs after one petticoat for twenty years." Oliver, on a stool in Mack & Company's counting-room in Upper Chester, bending his bald head over his ledgers, used to watch his employer out of the corner of an amused eye. When somebody repeated the remark about the single petticoat he moved a lump of candy from his left cheek to his right, and looked thoughtful.

"Old Mack is qualified to express an opinion," he admitted; "but until he raises my pay I can't afford new boots. So I can't follow his example and run after twenty petticoats in one year." Instead, he continued the pursuit of the one and only petticoat which, so far as he was concerned, Old Chester had ever possessed. He called on Miss Clara twice a week. On Wednesday evenings he brought his flute, and, just before he said good

night, went out into the hall and, sitting on the lowest step of the stairs, played a little tune. "I've left her door open; perhaps she hears," Clara always said. On Sunday afternoons, if the weather was fine, he and Clara went to walk; if it stormed, they sat in the parlor, and Oliver told her about the last novel he had read. Sometimes a tired look would come into her soft eyes, and when he saw it he would pop a "kiss" into his mouth as if it were a cork.

"I know I tire you by talking, Clara," he would mumble.

"A little," she would admit, gently.

Oliver Ormsby was rather a talkative person, and yet, curiously enough, Clara's silences charmed him.

"Love is the most incomprehensible thing!" Mrs. Ormsby used to say, despairingly. "I don't see how you stand her dumbness."

"I like it," Oliver declared.

"I want you to be married," his mother said; "I'm not going to live for ever, and you ought to have a wife to take care of you. You never know when to put on your winter flannels. Clara ought to take you or leave you. But she's just a dog in the manger!"

"I'd rather have Clara's affection, such as it is, than the gush of six blatherskite girls," he said, mildly. "Clara is an angel! Look how she takes care of her mother."

"Tch!" said Mrs. Ormsby.

But when he started off to make his Sunday-afternoon call she winked and blew her nose. "I don't care if she *is* an angel," she said, "she is no housekeeper! And he is the best friend any woman ever had."

On that particular October Sunday afternoon, Oliver, when he presented himself at Clara's door, found her with a faintly eager look in her face.

"I have something to tell you!" she said, a thrill of excitement in her voice.

"Let's take a walk," Oliver suggested, "and you can tell me then."

She agreed, and went up to her room to smooth her hair down over her ears and put on a little scoop bonnet which had a wreath of pansies inside the brim. When she tied the lilac ribbons under her chin her eyes were so vague with happiness that the bow was even more careless than usual. Then she went into her mother's room; Maggie sat by a window, rocking drowsily, and on the bed was the loglike figure, blind, dumb —deaf, as far as any one knew. But Clara bent over, and whispered in the livid ear: "Good-by, dear mother. I am going out to walk. With Oliver. I'll tell him the news." She kissed the cheek that seemed dead to the soft pressure of her lips, and sighed. "You'll speak to her sometimes, Maggie, to let her know you are here?"

"Yes, me dear," Maggie promised, sleepily.

Oliver, waiting in the parlor, took the wrapper

off a "kiss," read the line of verse printed in blunt, gray type on the strip of paper that was folded about it, and popped the candy into his left cheek; then he opened the *Poetesses of America* which lay in the glory of its gilt binding on the marble-topped center-table, and read until he heard a step on the stairs. He turned as she entered, and looked at the girl he had loved so long—she was still a girl to Oliver; he saw the sweet face, the pansy-trimmed bonnet, the black mantilla over a shimmering lavender silk dress; he saw the faint excitement in the myrtle-blue eyes; he never saw the little wrinkles or the gray hairs; still less did he see the dog in the manger. He opened her parasol for her as they stepped out into the October sunshine, and then he said, gaily:

"Well, what's the wonderful news?"

"Oh, Oliver!" she said. "Think! I've heard from Fanny!"

"Fanny who?" he asked (which showed that he was not one of Miss Ellen's girls! The idea of saying, 'Fanny *who?*')

She told him 'who,' briefly.

"Oh yes; I remember her. Fat girl."

"She and I are friends, Oliver," she said, gravely.

"Yes; I know you are; at least I know *you* are. As for her, seems to me a friend wouldn't let it be so long between drinks."

"Oliver!"

"Between letters. Have a 'kiss' Clara? Why does she write now?"

The emphasis on "now" was delicate, but it brought the color into Clara's face. She waved the "kiss" aside.

"She knows that I want to hear from her, *now*."

"I mean, why hasn't she been writing?"

Fanny's friend was silent. Her silence was always like a soft finger laid against Oliver's lips; he swallowed what he wanted to say, and for some time the only sound was the brush of their steps through the fallen leaves. Under the bare branches of the maples the October sunshine fell warm on dells of frosted brakes and patches of vividly green moss; the trunks of the little white birches, bending, some of them, sidewise, from forgotten ice-storms, were gilded with sunshine. Clara, Oliver thought, was like one of these virginal trees. The people who wrapped the poetry around the "kisses" might print something about birch-trees instead of the everlasting

> . . . rose is red, the violet blue,
> Sugar is sweet, and so are you.

"Why," he reflected, "don't they say something like: *Sidewise they lean, the little lady trees, as if they mourned their softly falling leaves. . . .* No; leaves don't rhyme. . . . *As if they feared the —the—the roving robber breeze.*"

Then he forgot his rhymes with a start. Clara was speaking:

"Her son is dead. She was too unhappy to write."

"Yes?" Oliver said.

The path had brought them to the top of the hill, and they paused to look down across meadows at the river slipping in a silver gleam towards the haze of darkening amethyst in the west. Clara seemed to be thinking aloud:

"She doesn't like her husband's relations."

"Maybe they don't like her."

"She is my *friend*, Oliver," she reproved him, gently.

"I never could see why, because a person was my friend, he was beyond criticism. Clara, what rhymes with 'trees'?"

Clara shook her head. Oliver found a convenient log, and, sitting down on it, drew his flute from his pocket; presently a little thread of melody wandered through the still air.

The sun, like a swimmer standing waist-deep in gray water, had sunk into a bank of cloud; scarcely half of the great red disk glowed above the engulfing purple. The gilt had faded from the white trunks of the birches. The faint tootle of the flute went on:

Oh, listen to the mocking-bird—

Suddenly Clara began to speak:

Fanny was very poor. She had no home. Her husband's relatives didn't ask her to live with them. Could Oliver imagine anything so unkind?

"Well," Oliver said, wiping his flute with a

big white silk handkerchief, "perhaps they haven't room for her."

"They should *make* room!"

Oliver put his flute in his pocket, opened a "kiss," and read the verse on the strip of paper. "*I* could do better than that," he said, disgustedly, and popped the square of candy into his mouth. "I wonder what put it into her head to write to you?" he mumbled.

Clara made no answer. Perhaps she wondered a little herself. She had supposed that Fanny had entirely forgotten her. To be sure, she had not forgotten Fanny; she never could forget her. Was not the blood covenant in the little brass-bound rosewood desk which stood on the table in her bedroom? Sometimes, a little sadly, she looked at that page torn from the old spelling-book and read the smudged lead-penciled words above Fanny's economical signature. But for years she had had no more impulse to communicate with Fanny than with some one who was dead. For that matter, Clara never had any "impulse" to do anything. That Fanny should suddenly write to her was as startling as if the sober earth had moved under her feet. She thrilled, as a sleeper stirs and smiles in some pleasant dream. She was so absorbed in the interest of it all that she hardly heard Oliver's comments on the birch-trees as they walked home, although she did flush a little when he said they looked like young ladies in white stockings—which showed Oliver

that an allusion to stockings was not quite delicate.

"She is nothing but an angel," he thought, disconsolately.

II

Perhaps Mrs. Herbert herself did not quite understand why she had written to her old friend, who, for all she knew, might be dead and buried as were most of her friends and relatives—poor Fanny! The letter was just one of her impulses. . . . She had met another financial cataclysm; she had had so many of them that one might have supposed she would have got used to them; but this was more complete than the others. A boarding-house which she had been running with comfortable efficiency for people who omitted to pay their bills, had finally failed, and it was when she was rescuing a few personal effects from the auctioneer's hammer that, suddenly bursting out laughing, she bid in a doll's trunk. She had spent the morning in the great barnlike auction-room, watching her possessions go at prices which were saved from being heartbreaking because they were ridiculous—with all her misfortunes Fanny had the luck of being able to see the ridiculous. It was when the little trunk was put up and was "going—going" for a nickel that her sense of humor got the better of her.

"The Lord knows what's in it—I don't!" she giggled to a woman who sat next to her; "but

just for the joke of it—*Ten cents!*" she bid, recklessly; and the little green trunk, with strips of lacquered tin across the top and two leather straps crumbling in rusty buckles, was handed down to her.

That night, in the hall bedroom of a boarding-house not nearly as well run as her own had been, but very successful, for all that, she pried the flimsy hasp open with the handle of her tooth-brush, and looked at the treasures.

Some of them were perfectly meaningless; what significance could there be in a bent and rusty nail? A pressed rose in a faded blue envelope roused no memories; a "button string," which broke as she lifted it and let the buttons roll all over the floor, she did recall; she and Clara Hale had each had a "button string."

"Good gracious! I haven't thought of Clara for years!" she said to herself. She wondered if Clara were married—or dead? At the bottom of the trunk was a yellowing sheet of paper, torn, apparently, from a book; she could hardly read what was scrawled on it in pencil, and the brown signature was so faint that she could not have deciphered it had not memory come to her assistance:

I promise to love Fanny all my life.
CLARA HALE.

Fanny put the paper down and laughed heartily. "Well, well, well! Why, I remember that night,

perfectly!" Suddenly she blinked away a tear. "My goodness! if Clara loves me, she's the only person on earth who does. I declare, I believe I'll write to her!" She jumped to her feet like a girl, and dashed off that letter which fell into her old friend's quiet life as a pebble falls into a smooth and silent pool. . . .

It was through Oliver Ormsby that Old Chester heard that Fanny had, as he expressed it, "come to life" and that the wonderful friendship had revived. Mrs. Ormsby was a little sharp when her son told her that the old correspondence was in full swing again; it seemed that now poor dangling Oliver was not to have even the pleasure of dangling; for all Clara's time, not spent at her mother's bedside, was given to writing letters to this Fanny Morrison—no, Herbert. Even the Sunday-afternoon walk was sometimes omitted because Clara was "busy writing."

Old Chester thought the whole affair rather foolish. Clara was nearly forty-five, and forty-five is too old for ecstasies. Old Chester was inclined to be disapproving; then, suddenly, something happened which made people forget everything but the old admiration for the "good daughter,"—admiration, and a peculiarly tender pity, for, after all Clara's years of devotion and service, all the loglike years, Mrs. Hale — entirely alone—had suddenly and quietly stopped breathing. It might have happened at any moment; nothing could have prevented it, and no one

could have foreseen it. Many times in these long years the inert body had been alone,—in that small household it was impossible that some one should be with her always. Only, on this particular day and moment, Clara was in the next room, "writing to that Fanny Morrison!" and—her mother died.

Of course the shock to Clara was great, and the effect of it was very strange. The renewal of the old friendship had stirred her faintly—but the reality of death burst in upon her stagnant life like the surge of a tidal-wave. And to it was added that soul-shaking thing, remorse. For, unreasonable as it was, she reproached herself for that lonely dying. This new pain awoke her mind as a rough hand might arouse a sleeping body. Her eyes, in their mists of tears, looked about her in scared bewilderment, and she clung to Oliver with a sort of frantic helplessness. Mrs. Ormsby told Old Chester she believed that, at last, her poor son was going to be appreciated!

"I wish she was anything of a housekeeper, though," she said, sighing. "I'll have to keep an eye on Oliver's flannels; *she'll* never think of 'em!" Mrs. Ormsby was really quite happy over the situation; she was not very fond of Clara, but she wanted Oliver to have what he wanted. Yet Oliver was never further from his heart's desire than now—and, poor fellow! he knew it, though his mother did not. Clara was staggering under the shock of the destruction of the habits

of life. For nearly thirty years she had lived in the monotonous round of small, pottering duties; for the last ten she had lived like a machine, simply with and for that silent figure on the bed. Now, suddenly, the motive power of the machine was withdrawn; everything stopped. Her clinging to Oliver was only the clinging to a little vestige of the old routine of life. And he realized it. If he had had any illusions they vanished the day of Mrs. Hale's funeral. He had stood beside her in the snow at the grave and felt her quiver at that sound which is like no other sound on earth: "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes"—and the dust and ashes fall upon the coffin down there between the walls of earth. The crumbling rattle of that handful of gravel does not stir the sleeper under the coffin-lid, but the mourner awakes to every reality of loss. Clara, hearing that sound, leaned against Oliver, and he felt the shudder that ran through her; he put his arm around her, and she accepted it as she would have accepted any other human arm; she leaned on him, as she might have leaned against a stone, or the trunk of a tree. He knew then that he would never again ask her to marry him. He would always love her, he told himself, but he would love her differently, for she was an angel.

In the next few weeks he was like her shadow. Every evening when he came home from his work he stopped at her door; every morning he looked in on her before he started for Upper Chester.

She was quieter than ever. Perhaps the cessation of those hours of reading aloud plunged her into deeper waters of silence. But although she did not often speak, Oliver felt that her heart was quite open to him. A crystal heart! Perhaps that was why it was so cold. But, being crystal, it could not conceal anything; its sorrow and its self-reproach and its loneliness were so obvious that words were not needed. Feeling this, the discovery of something in her mind of which he had never dreamed, was a distinct shock to him. It was about two months after Mrs. Hale's death. He had been sitting at Clara's fireside, telling her about a book he had been reading, when, noticing that she was not listening to him, he swallowed a half-sucked "kiss," and took his flute out of his pocket. He was just about to begin the faint tootle-tootle of the "Mocking-Bird" when she spoke. In his amazement he kept the flute against his lips and stared at her in complete silence.

"I am all alone," she ended.

"Clara, you have me!"

"I have nothing to do."

"Your house?"

"Fanny has no house."

"But to ask her to come and live with you!" he said, with a gasp. "Why, my dear Clara!" For a minute he was silent with dismay. Then he began to wipe his flute. "It's a very dangerous thing to ask anybody to *live* with you."

"She isn't 'anybody.' She is my Friend."

"But you don't know her the least bit in the world! She's an absolute stranger."

"A stranger? She is my *Friend!*"

"Clara, consider; you haven't seen her for—how many years, did you tell me? Thirty! Good gracious! I tell you you don't know her any more than Adam!"

"I have known her all my life."

"Ask her to visit you for a fortnight," he urged; "for a month, even; then, if you like her—"

"'*Like*' my Friend?"

"If you like her, ask her to make a long visit. But don't, for Heaven's sake, put on a sticking-plaster!"

'Oliver!"

But Oliver Ormsby was not to be stayed: "It's a very great risk!"

"She is coming next week," Clara said.

Oliver was silent. He was very much troubled. It was not only the "risk," it was the shock of discovering in an absolutely familiar landscape something entirely new. Who could have dreamed of anything positive in this gently negative mind? Clara had not had a new idea in twenty years, and Oliver Ormsby had loved her for her sterile serenity. Now, suddenly, she had an idea which would change her whole method of living! No wonder Oliver was startled. Indeed, he was so disturbed that he stopped on his way home at

the rectory and poured out his troubles to Dr. Lavendar. . . . "And she has actually asked this Fanny Morrison to come and live with her for ever!" he ended.

"Heaven is to be their home, then, I presume?" said Dr. Lavendar.

"Far from it—Old Chester! You know it's folly, Dr. Lavendar. They are absolute strangers."

"They are," Dr. Lavendar agreed.

"This woman will be a perfect Old Man of the Sea!"

"Oh, she may be all right," Dr. Lavendar comforted him. "The Morrisons were nice people, though the father was the kind that talked you to death. But of course it's rash in Clara to give her an indefinite invitation."

"Do go and see her, sir," Oliver urged.

And Dr. Lavendar said he would.

He did; but his sensible words slipped off her mind like water—"off a rose-leaf, I suppose?" Oliver interpolated, despairingly.

"I was going to say off a duck's back," Dr. Lavendar said, "but rose-leaf will do. I believe you write poetry, Oliver?"

Oliver was equal to the question. "Do I look like a poet, sir?" he said, grinning.

"All the same, I have faith to believe you do." the old man insisted.

"Faith is the evidence of things not seen," Oliver parried.

Dr. Lavendar chuckled. "I told Clara," he

said, "that thirty years' absence makes strangers of most of us."

"What did she say?"

She implied that one might make the same objection to meeting one's friends in heaven."

"That's rather unanswerable," Clara's lover said, ruefully.

"No, it isn't," the old man said; "our friends in heaven are with their Heavenly Father. If we keep close to Him we can't get far from them."

"Oh," said Oliver, respectfully; "yes; certainly; of course. But, Dr. Lavendar, don't you think we can keep this woman from coming?"

"I don't believe we can. She's forlorn, and practically homeless. Clara has a house, and a little money, and nothing to do. No, you can't stop it. But it's possible Mrs. Herbert won't like it when she gets here. That will stop it."

"No such luck," Oliver said, gloomily.

III

Dr. Lavendar was right; of course it could not be stopped.

> It will be a favor to me [Clara had written Mrs. Herbert], a *kindness*. Won't you come? My house is yours; my money is yours. I will be grateful to you as long as I live if you will come. I have nobody in the world now but you. Remember our vow—we promised to love each other for ever. You must live with me as long as I live.

When she wrote those words Clara was holding in her hand the page torn from the old spelling-

book, and looking at that faint brown scrawl: "Fanny Morr—" It seemed to her that Fanny could not say "no"!

It seemed so to Fanny, too. And who can wonder? Who could say "no" to such an appeal? At least what lonely, almost penniless woman could say "no"? She made a few perfunctory protestations, but at the end of her letter she yielded:

I am crazy to be with you—my own darling Clara; and, as you say, we will never part again. I'll burn my bridges. I'll sell everything I own, and bid my friends here "good-by" for ever! I will start on the fifteenth.

When Fanny wrote that letter, in the third-rate boarding-house in San Francisco, the tears stood in her eyes. Then she added a postscript:

There isn't anybody who cares whether I am alive or dead, except you!

Yes, Clara cared. Cared so much that Fanny was to have no more worry about money, no more loneliness, no more discomfort. The last twenty years had been all worry and loneliness—"and fighting just to keep alive," as she had told Clara in an earlier letter.

How Clara had answered those bitter words! Fanny's eyes filled with tears of sheer comfort as she remembered the tender assurances:

You shall never be lonely again—or poor. I love you, and all that I have is yours.

Fanny put her head down on the wabbly table of her hall bedroom, and cried hard. Then she got up, dipped the corner of the meager boarding-house towel in the water-pitcher, sopped her eyes, and began joyfully to pack.

"I must take the 'vow' with me," she thought, smiling. She stopped once to look at herself in the glass. "I suppose I've changed," she said, doubtfully. A large, worn, honest face, a face full of keen and friendly interest in every human experience, her own and other people's, stared back at her from the mirror. It left no doubt as to the "change." "Clara won't know me," she thought, laughing. "Well, very likely she has changed, too! But my *heart* hasn't changed!" she reassured herself, gaily. "I'm just as fond of Clara as ever; and it's wonderful to think she wants me. Oh, how much I have to tell her!"

The packing-up did not take long—she had so few possessions; but she gave herself time to see all her friends and her husband's relatives, and to spread the news of her good fortune. "It's a real good-by," she said. "I'm going to live with my friend for the rest of my days." . . . Then she started. In the long journey East, thinking of all the things she had to tell Clara, all the things that had happened in these thirty years, Fanny wondered how she should ever get through her story! She had had a hard life, but remembering it was a delight, because even its hardships had been interesting. Clara would want to know every

single thing that had happened to her. Well, Fanny would tell her. What good talks they would have! Then she would stop and think of Clara's life. . . . How strange she never married; how she must miss her mother. Well, Fanny would do her best to comfort her. She would do everything on earth for her! It seemed to Fanny that she could not do enough to show her gratitude for this wonderful thing—Clara's continuing friendship! "She shall never regret it," she told herself again and again; "I will never, never leave her!"

Far off in Old Chester, Clara, too, was thinking of her good fortune. Fanny was coming to live with her "for ever." Her mind was so alert that she not only talked, but in a pottering way she acted. She made a hundred nervous preparations —new paper in Fanny's room, new curtains in the windows, plans for Fanny's comfort. Her whole expression changed; she was awake! She counted the hours until Fanny could arrive. And at last the hour came. . . .

It was an April day of sudden showers and soft winds, and the first daffodil of the year. The afternoon stage came jogging and tugging along the road; Clara was waiting on her doorstep, and when the stage drew up at the end of the garden she went running down the path. A stout lady with a pleasant red face got out, and Clara looked beyond her for Fanny. The lady put a bird-cage on the sidewalk, then, drop-

ping a bandbox and stumbling over it, rushed forward with extended arms. Clara stepped back for just one quivering minute.

"*Fanny?*" she said, and was folded in a smothering embrace.

"I knew you the minute I set eyes on you!" said Fanny.

Both women wept; then, with their arms about each other, they entered the house. Fanny was so overcome and so out of breath that she got no farther than the hall sofa.

"Oh, Clara!" she gasped; "Clara!"

Clara, trembling, held the fat hand in its worn black kid glove against her breast. She could not speak. Fanny, fumbling with her other hand for her handkerchief, blew her nose and laughed.

"To think I'm here!" She looked around the hall—at the faded landscape paper, at the mahogany table under the old mirror, at the yellowing engravings on the wall—the "Destruction of Nineveh" and the "Death-bed of Daniel Webster"; through the open doorway at the other end of the passage, one could see the faintly greening grass under a big locust-tree; it was all the same—all just the same as when she saw it last, more than thirty years ago! Nothing had changed; not Old Chester, not the house, not Clara, not *friendship*. Nothing had changed—except Fanny herself.

"Oh," she said, "think of all that has happened since I saw this hall! I remember your

mother stood right there at the foot of the stairs. I can see her now. She had on a black-and-white-check silk. Oh, Clara!"

Clara nodded; she was still trembling.

"I little thought of all that was going to happen to me! And to you, my darling Clara! Your poor, dear mother! But, oh, Clara, my poor Hale! Since he died I've been so lonely. You'd have thought my husband's relatives would have been a comfort; but they weren't. As my landlady said, your husband's relatives hardly ever are; oh, she was such a sweet woman! And she's had so much trouble herself—her husband left her for another woman; well, I've never had *that* sort of trouble, I'm thankful to say—Charles was the best man that ever lived. She had three daughters, and they all died of diphtheria—did you ever hear of anything so awful? But I wish you could hear her talk of them! She's a Spiritualist, and gets comfort out of that; dear knows I wish I was! I was telling one of the ladies on the train, a Mrs. Elder, of Buffalo (such a fine woman, but lame; she has to use crutches), some of her experiences; she said they were wonderful! Her husband's aunt had some strange experiences, too; I must tell you about them. Well, I wish I'd had any myself! My poor Hale! If I could have a word from him I'd—"

"Fanny, you must be tired," Clara broke in; "dear Fanny, you must—*rest*." Clara spoke breathlessly. "Come up to your room."

She had retreated to the lowest step of the stairs, almost as if she had been swept there by the torrent of words.

"Oh, I'm not tired!" Fanny said, cheerfully. "Clara! Let me look at you. Well, my goodness! You've not changed a bit! Oh, Clara, let me fix your collar. You are just the same dear, darling, untidy thing! Oh, my bird! I hope you haven't a cat? I must go and get Dicky, and—"

Clara followed her as she hurried out to collect the bird and the bandbox and a few other things which she had left at the roadside. Then they went up to the room that had been prepared for the guest,—no, not a "guest"! "It is your *home*, Fanny. Yours as much as mine," Clara whispered.

Fanny gave her a hearty kiss. "Oh, my darling Clara!" she said, "how good you are!" The birdcage which Clara was carrying banged against the banisters, and she dropped a parcel or two, which Fanny, laughing excitedly, picked up. "The hall bedroom in that horrid boarding-house where I've been all winter was freezing cold," she said; "though it had a sourthern exposure; I always insist on a southern exposure. As I used to say to my poor, dear boy, 'You never would have taken that cold if you had only insisted'— Oh, Clara, you can't imagine what I have suf— Clara, this stair-carpet needs to be tacked down better; I'll do it. I tell you what, my dear, I'm

going to take care of you! Even Charles's relatives had to admit that I took the best of care of—"

And so on, and on, and on. The stream of talk never stopped, and in the midst of it Dicky began to sing. Clara looked at him with dazed eyes; suddenly, she slipped out of the room.

"I am going to get you a cup of tea," she called back, and fled.

In the upper hall she stood for a few minutes, perfectly motionless, breathing quickly, her hands opening and closing, and her face very red. She looked as if she had been in a high wind, and had not yet got her breath.

She sent Maggie up with the tea, and that faithful woman came down-stairs full of enthusiasm for the new member of the family.

"There! She has a tongue in her head," Maggie exulted; "I like folks that talk some. This house is silent as the tomb. And I could hear her bird singing. I guess my hearing is improved!" Maggie was immensely pleased.

"Mrs. Herbert is wonderful, Maggie," Miss Clara said, "and she's my best Friend."

Old Chester was delighted with Fanny. "She's very good-hearted," Old Chester said.

"Oliver likes her," Mrs. Ormsby said; "and I hear she's a fine housekeeper."

"She takes right hold of the work," old Maggie declared.

"She's too fat," Miss Ellen's girls objected; "and her hands are so red."

"She's gone through some rough weather," Captain Price said, "and she wants patching; but her timbers are sound. All she needs is a captain. Oliver, can't you take out papers?"

"She would be just the wife for Jim Williams," Martha King confided to her husband; "she is such a conversationalist."

"Good Lord!" said Dr. King.

Everybody had something to say about the new arrival; but Miss Clara said only one thing: "*She is my Friend.*"

As the summer passed, Mrs. Herbert, long bereft of home joys and toils, gradually, with Clara's silent acquiescence, did most of the housekeeping; she darned Clara's stockings and the worn old table linen; she dusted, she arranged flowers, she planned the meals; she even, good-naturedly, shoved old Maggie aside, and did a little cooking, "for I love to make nice things for you, my darling Clara," she said.

But whether she cooked, or cleaned, or did Clara's mending, she talked loudly every minute, to the shrill accompaniment of Dicky's incessant singing. Maggie, who had drowsed most of the time since she entered Miss Clara's service, woke up. She would stand open-mouthed, with her hands in the dough, listening to Mrs. Herbert, or Dick, or both together. Everything that Mrs. Herbert said interested her; she was enthralled

by an account of the minister of the Congregational church who got married and left Mrs. Herbert's boarding-house, though he had said he knew he would never get such broiled ham for his breakfast as she gave him; his wife was well-meaning, but young, and had no training; her mother had been in an insane-asylum, poor girl! Mrs. Herbert was so sorry for insane people. One lady she knew wouldn't wear anything blue, which was the beginning of insan— And so on, and on, and on, Maggie gaping with interest, while her mistress, in the dining-room, surreptitiously threw an apron over Dicky's cage to keep him quiet.

"She is as good as a novel," Oliver said, after hearing some of Mrs. Herbert's stories. She was better! For she had actually seen some of the happenings she detailed: She knew a man whose brother had been murdered, which was almost as interesting as knowing the murderer. She had a friend who had been divorced ("What!" said Old Chester; "how shocking! But you meet all kinds of people in the West"). She had employed a Chinaman in her kitchen!

"Did he pray to an idol?" asked one of Miss Ellen's girls, excitedly; then, with regretful second thought, "Oh, I suppose he was converted?"

"Not he, I'm thankful to say," said Mrs. Herbert; "I wouldn't have a Christian Chinaman in my kitchen!"

"How she *does* talk!" said Old Chester, horri-

fied. "Well, at any rate, she is devoted to Miss Clara."

She *was* devoted. The old affection had welled up in Fanny's heart as honestly as ever, and she put it into words, endless words; excited, impulsive words; loud words, sincere to the point of fatuousness. Clara's responses became briefer and briefer.

"Oh, Clara, darling, I love you so!" Fanny would say, bursting into Clara's room in the morning without knocking, and throwing large bare arms around Clara's delicate, shrinking shoulders. "I do love you so! As I said to Maggie yesterday, 'I've known Miss Clara ever since she was a little, tiny thing, and—' What is the matter, Clara?"

"I—I think I'll shut the door. The bird is singing so loudly," Clara would say, wriggling out of the big embrace.

"Oh, I'll shut it," Fanny would protest, good-naturedly. "Don't be late for breakfast!" she would call back; "and, Clara, *do* put your collar on straight!" Then the door would slam behind her.

Left to herself, Clara would pin on her collar with quivering fingers. The comments upon her clothes irked her, and oh, that bird! But she loved Fanny. When she was by herself, in the blessed silence of her own room, she would think how much she loved her. She did not realize, of course, that the Fanny she loved was not this

large, loud, talkative lady, but a freckled girl, with a rosy face, and chestnut curls caught back with a hair-ribbon that matched her own.

The Clara that Fanny loved, however, was this gentle, inexact, inarticulate person of forty-five, who had been just as gentle, just as inexact, just as speechless, at fourteen. A Clara to protect, to spare, to persuade—even to pity.

"Poor Clara!" Fanny used to say, heartily, "she doesn't know how to make herself comfortable." Clara's lack of order was a real annoyance to her, but she was very patient with it. It was in the early fall that, with almost tearful tenderness over one of Clara's vaguenesses, she said "poor, dear Clara." Now it is a curious thing—you can say "poor" Clara, or "dear" Clara, but if you say "poor, dear Clara" you compose love's epitaph. "Poor dear" marks the death of affection between equals. It is not virile enough for disapproval, and not unqualified enough for love. It always means impatience, and sometimes it means contempt. One hears it applied to parents who have fallen behind in the march—"poor, dear father," "poor, dear mother." Clara was thirty years behind Fanny. She had stood still in her sheltered serenity, while Fanny, efficient and sensible, had forged ahead into the realities of grief and worry and happiness and disappointment—in fact, into Life. Only two realities had ever touched Clara—the pain of that parting, thirty years ago, and the later pain of her mother's death.

Now, little by little, she was sinking back into the passivity which lay between her two emotional experiences; a passivity against which Fanny's affectionate confidences dashed themselves and fell back in pained astonishment. Clara used to listen to her voluble recital of her experiences with a look of shrinking endurance; sometimes it was endurance without listening, the flood of words pouring over her mind and leaving no impression whatever. But sometimes endurance broke down. When Clara had heard Fanny's voice and the canary's together, up to a certain point, she would suddenly slip away to the shelter of her own room, and there, her hands over her ears, her flushed face pressing against the wall as if to cool it, she would whisper, "Oh, oh, oh!" She never said more than this.

However, to the outside world the experiment of having Fanny live with her had turned out very well. Oliver Ormsby even reproached himself for his forebodings about it. The life, together, which was to be "for ever," had run some six months before he began to be anxious. He would listen, grinning with amusement, to Fanny's stories, then, in the midst of one of them, he would catch that look of inarticulate endurance in Clara's eyes. After this had happened half a dozen times he began to be uneasy even while he laughed. His first realization of the situation came one Sunday evening, when they all three sat about the fire in the parlor, and Fanny told a story

which turned on letter-writing; it ended in some such way as this: "But I sympathized with Mr. Smith. I find it hard to write letters myself. Clara knows I do, don't you, Clara? But I told him, said I, 'Well, Mr. Smith, a long correspondence is like a pair of trousers without any galluses—hard to keep up!'"

Oliver, laughing, caught sight of the shocked bewilderment in Clara's eyes, and his face sobered. That allusion to galluses had offended her! Anything indelicate offended Clara. "Mrs. Herbert and I are a coarse pair," he told himself, uneasily. He repeated the mild joke to his mother, rather tentatively, to see just how coarse he and Mrs. Herbert were, and old Mrs. Ormsby laughed quite as heartily as he had done, which comforted him a little. But he realized that to Clara's mind Fanny's talk was like the touch of rude fingers on a butterfly's wing.

"It's hard on Clara," he thought, frowning. And after that he watched the "friends" pretty closely.

However, they got through that winter.

It was in the early spring that Oliver, opening the front door one Sunday afternoon, almost ran into Clara, fleeing, scarlet-faced, from the parlor. She stopped, held out her hands to him, and seemed to gasp for breath; then she said, panting, "She . . . *talks*."

She would have rushed on up-stairs, but he detained her.

"I've come to take you out to walk," he said, soothingly.

She nodded, and was gone. While he waited for her to put on her bonnet Mrs. Herbert came out into the hall. She was plainly perplexed.

"Something is the matter with Clara," she said; "I'm afraid she's nervous. Dicky began to sing —he's the greatest singer! A bird-dealer in San Francisco, a Mr. Marks, who was very fond of snakes—one of them bit his wife's mother; horrid woman, she was!—he told me Dicky was the finest singer he had ever had; and I said, 'Yes, he is!' And I was telling Clara about it, and suddenly she dashed out of the room—"

At that moment Clara came down-stairs as silently as a shadow. Fanny gave her a hearty kiss, and said a walk would do her good.

"You are nervous, Clara; I was just saying to Mr. Ormsby, 'Clara is ner—' Now, don't hurry home. Oh, Clara, wait; let me straighten that bow. I'll help Maggie with supper. And—"

But Oliver had got her out of the house, and Fanny's cheerful voice died away behind them. He hoped she would tell him just what had happened, but she was speechless. Indeed, those two disloyal words, flung at him when he entered, had taken all her strength.

It was in July that the situation became acute. Something happened: one morning Fanny found the door of Dicky's cage open. Dicky was gone! She stood by the empty cage aghast. "How

could he get out? He *couldn't* have opened the door! Clara, do you suppose Maggie has been tampering with—"

"I did it," Clara said, whitely.

Fanny turned and looked at her in actual fright. Had Clara gone crazy?

"I couldn't stand him," Clara whispered.

The two women stared at each other; each suddenly knew that the other was a stranger to her. There was a moment of appalled silence, then Fanny burst out:

"I do everything for you, and you begrudge me my bird! He will *freeze!*" she said, fiercely.

"He can't freeze, in July," Clara stammered.

"He will next winter," Fanny said, in a suppressed voice. This time it was she who flew out of the room. She fled farther than Clara. She went over to Mrs. Ormsby's, and blurted the whole thing out. "I'm just distracted!" she said. "I'm so unhappy! I try to take care of Clara—she's as helpless as a child about her housekeeping, and her clothes make me frantic; but I don't know what's the matter with her. She seems to resent it if I sew on a button for her! I made her take off her sacque so I could sew on a button, and she was as—as sulky as a child. But I can't bear to see untidiness. And now to think that she should let my bird out! My poor little Dicky —the only thing I had left! I declare, I don't know what to do."

"Go home," Mrs. Ormsby said.

"I haven't any home," Fanny said, despairingly. "I sold every stick of furniture I owned. And my husband's relatives wouldn't want me, and—and I haven't got the money to go back, anyhow."

"I've no doubt Clara would help you," Mrs. Ormsby began.

Fanny shook her head. "I know she would help me, but—" Then it all came out: "I'd be ashamed to go back. I told my husband's relatives I was going to live here for the rest of my life," she confessed. Tears of wounded vanity stood in her honest eyes. "Oh, she's so cold to me, Mrs. Ormsby; and we've been friends all our lives! And I do love her so; I'd do anything in the world for her! I tell her so every day. I say, 'I do love you, Clara; I'd do anything in the world for you'—"

"Except stop talking," Mrs. Ormsby said, under her breath.

"Yesterday I said, 'I'll make you a Dutch apple-cake, Clara. My Dutch apple-cake is real good. There was a Mrs. Halstead in California, a nice woman, though her son was in prison for forgery. I must tell you about him: his wife had triplets, and she—I don't mean the wife, I mean Mrs. Halstead—she said my Dut—' But Clara just got up and flew out of the room. I don't understand it! As I was saying to Mrs. King yesterday—no; day before yesterday. No, it *was* yesterday, right outside Mr. Horace Shields's store; I said, 'I don't understand poor, dear

Clara.' And Mrs. King said— Mrs. Ormsby, I haven't a place on earth to go, or I'd go."

"I'm afraid I can't advise," Mrs. Ormsby said. "Why don't you ask my son what you'd better do?"

"I believe I will," Mrs. Herbert said, wiping her eyes. "Oh, what a man he is, always so kind and wise!"

"He's a good friend," Oliver's mother said.

He was; but poor Oliver! he was between the upper and the nether millstone! Fanny poured out her heart to him about Dicky, and he winced with sympathy. Then Clara—his Clara!—his silent angel!—just looked at him with haggard eyes. "I couldn't stand Dicky," she confessed. And Oliver's sympathy was so intense that the tears actually stood in his own eyes.

"She'll kill Clara," he told his mother.

"Well, Clara did her best to kill Dicky," the old lady reminded him.

"She's looking dreadfully," Oliver said, sighing. "It's got to stop." Finally, in his worry, he told Clara so. It was on one of their Sunday-afternoon walks. Clara, very white, entirely speechless, was pacing along at his side on the wooded path between her sister birch-trees.

"Have a 'kiss'?" he said. "No? Clara, she'll be the death of you!"

She did not pretend not to understand him. "She does—talk," she admitted.

"I wish she would go away," he said.

"She hasn't any place to go," Clara whispered, quivering.

"Well, this sort of thing can't go on!" Oliver declared, desperately; "she's dreadfully unhappy."

Clara gave him a surprised look. "Fanny?"

"Yes; she's miserable."

"*Fanny!*"

It was Oliver whose face flashed into surprise. "Why, haven't you thought how she was feeling about it?"

She was silent for a long time; then, with evident effort, she said, "I didn't suppose she minded."

"Of course she minds—poor Fanny! And you know you oughtn't to have let her wretched little bird out."

"I couldn't—*bear* it," she said, with a gasp.

He did not argue with her. "I tell you, it will kill you, if it keeps on, Clara."

Clara had nothing to say. It seemed to her, her head still dizzy from that resonant, cheerful, incessant voice, that probably he was right. Fanny would kill her. But nothing could be done. They were Friends. Friends cannot part. Fanny had come to Old Chester to live and die with her.

"It's you who will do the dying," Oliver said, grimly.

Clara turned hunted eyes on him. "If I could only go—anywhere."

"She's the one to go, of course," he said; "but if she has no place to go— Why don't you

THE SUGGESTION OF THOSE GIVING HANDS WAS INESCAPABLE

travel?" he ended, helplessly. But even as he suggested it he saw the absurdity of the idea; this flower-like creature, buffeting about by herself in railroad-trains or on steamboats! Of course it was impossible. "Couldn't you just make up your mind not to mind her, Clara? She is really a very nice woman; a kind, good woman. You know she is."

Clara nodded. "She is my Friend," she said.

"*I* find her interesting," he declared. "I really do! I like her. And I like her long stories."

Clara turned sharply around, then frantically flung her hands out to him as if she were giving him something. "*Oh!*" she said.

That was all. But Oliver Ormsby stood stock-still in the path. The suggestion of those giving hands was inescapable. "I like her," he stammered, "but—"

Clara's face had fallen into dull unhappiness again. Her gesture had had no conscious intention. "I will soon—hate her," she said.

His eyes narrowed with thought. "Yet if she didn't live with you, you'd always love her?"

Clara made no answer. Oliver unfolded a strip of verse from a sticky "kiss" and read it mechanically:

> If you love me as I love you
> No knife can cut—

"Clara, you know I love you. If you would only—" He paused. No, he would *not* propose

again! It was like asking a drop of dew to lie in his hand. Yet she would die if this sort of thing went on! She was getting thinner; she looked ten years older than she did a year ago. She was as frail as a little birch-tree that has bent under an ice-storm. But even as he looked at her he had a glow of pity for Fanny, for, after all, it *was* hard on her, too! All the more so because she couldn't possibly understand what was the matter. The idea which leaped into his mind when those two shaking hands had seemed to offer Fanny to any one who would take her, clamored for a hearing. "I couldn't ask her to come and live with me," he argued to himself, distractedly; "it wouldn't be proper—mother isn't going to live for ever, as she says. No; I couldn't ask her, except—except. . . . It would save Clara if I did *that*," he told himself. But what would Clara herself say to such a thing? Would she believe him false to her? Would it wound her? The mere idea of that gave him a strange pang of happiness, but it instantly ceased: "It couldn't wound her; she has never cared for me. And what would Fanny say to such an arrangement?" The question gave him pause. He had thought only of Clara. Fanny's a nice woman; too good for me! Very likely she wouldn't look at me." His fingers were crumpling the sticky strip of paper into a little ball, and he moved his "kiss" agitatedly from one cheek to the other. Yet, by "such an arrangement," Fanny and Clara

could go on being friends for ever. "Yes; I could save Clara, if only Fanny can put up with me. But can she?"

All the way home his startled mind asked this question. By the time he reached Clara's gate, he was very apprehensive. After all, why should Fanny put up with him?—put up with a stout, bald gentleman who played on the flute and read novels, and whose taste ran to the simplicity of "kisses"; a man who could not honestly say he was in love with her? "It would save Clara; but Fanny's got to think of herself, and she may not see her way clear to take me," he told himself. The anxiety in his face was keener than any that had showed itself in these later years in his semiannual proposals to Clara. But it was soon allayed. . . .

After the first gasp of astonishment (he offered himself the next day), Mrs. Herbert "saw her way" with entire clearness.

"'Course you and I aren't two love-sick youngsters," she said, frankly; "but I do like you, Mr. Ormsby, and if you like me, why, I'm willing. It will be a relief to get out of this house!"

"No, we are not youngsters," Oliver agreed; "and I've been in love with Clara for twenty-four years. I don't know whether you knew that?"

"If I had a cataract on each eye I could see it," she told him, laughing.

"She has never cared for me," he said, simply; "as for you and me, why, we are good friends, and I will do my best to make you happy."

"All right!" said Mrs. Herbert, and held out a warm and hearty hand.

Old Chester fairly buzzed with excitement.

"Faithléss!" said Miss Ellen's girls; "he is a faithless lover, and she is a faithless Friend. And Miss Clara is an angel!"

"How do you like it?" Dr. Lavendar asked Mrs. Ormsby.

"I'm as pleased as can be!" she declared. "Fanny is a good housekeeper, and she'll look after his winter flannels."

"What does Andromeda say?" Dr. Lavendar inquired.

"Andromeda?" Mrs. Ormsby said, puzzled. "Who is Andromeda?"

"Ask Oliver," said Dr. Lavendar; "and tell him I always liked Perseus."

"Now, what did he mean?" Mrs. Ormsby asked her son at supper that night. "Who is Andromeda?"

"Clara, I suppose," Oliver said, grinning; "but I'll have Dr. Lavendar know that, though I may be a Perseus, there's no sea-monster in this story! Fanny is a fine woman."

"She is," the old lady said, contentedly. "I don't know whether you are a Perseus, whatever that is, or not, but I'll tell you one thing you are: you're a *Friend!* You can tell Clara Hale so, with my compliments!"

THE END

Deland, Margaret

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